

CLEARING WEATHER



CORNELIA
MEIGS

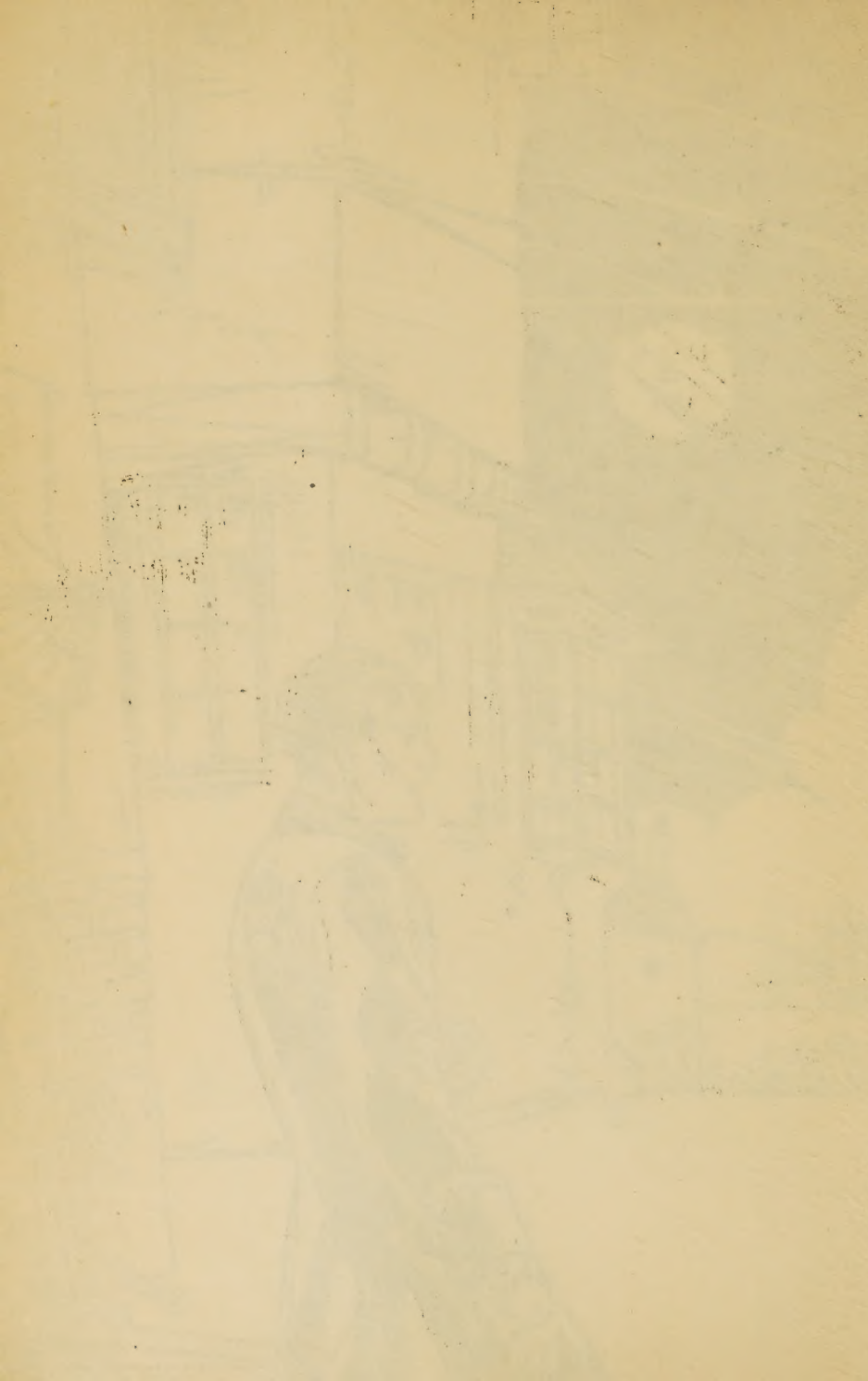
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*"It is not the money. It is the ships. I must build ships.
But no one wants them now."*

CLEARING WEATHER

BY
CORNELIA MEIGS



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
FRANK DOBIAS

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BUILD SHIPS. BUT NO ONE WANTS THEM NOW."

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CLEARING WEATHER



CHAPTER I

HOAR FROST

The bent plum trees set in the square of rough grass behind the Blackbird Inn, were as white on this mild February morning as though it were May. Ordinarily their branches were as black with age as they were twisted by sea winds; for beyond the hawthorne hedge was the marsh, across which gales from the north and east could sweep unhindered; and beyond the marsh was the sea. It was neither blossom nor snow which covered the wide-reaching boughs in that hazy sunshine, but a gossamer-light veil of frost which lay upon every branch and twig, and penciled each with a delicate tracery of white. Nicholas Drury opening the door which gave upon the garden, could see that the rime-covered boughs were not stirred by any breath of wind and that even the brown expanse of the marsh lay unrippled by any breeze in the stillness of the winter dawn. Across the tops of the dun and yellow, frost-tipped grasses, he could see the slate-gray water with white ripples where the slow swells curved and broke about Pelman Island and along the rocky reach of Branscomb Head. The horizon was faintly blurred, as though the mist which had lain over the garden all night and had gathered in airy lines of white upon

the trees and grass, was now returning whence it had come.

He stood upon the doorstone, a tall boy of nineteen, well knit, with brown hair which, at the back of his head, never lay quite smooth. He was looking across the garden with a glance vague, at first, then growing intent with surprise and curiosity. Finally he passed his hand across his eyes as though to rub away the obscuring weariness of the night just past, and looked again.

He saw that the grass below the plum trees was covered with frost also, each yellow blade beaded with the same perishable whiteness which a touch would destroy. A touch had indeed dislodged it at regular intervals; for all across the lawn leading up from the direction of the marsh was a line of striding footsteps. So faintly were they printed upon that shining surface that at one moment the boy was quite sure he could make out each separate footfall reaching from the far corner of the hedge to the little bow window of the room out of which he had come; yet at the next instant it seemed as though the marks were only the shadows of tree and hedge, or merely a deceiving trick of the sparkling rime. He could only stare and wonder and think, first that he saw them and then that he did not.

Behind him the house was slowly awaking from the troubled slumber of night to the work of the day. Footsteps and voices were going up and down in the passage, and in the stone-flagged kitchen where a lattice window was thrown open. But the voices, for the most part, spoke in whispers, and the footsteps either hesitated or hurried. Once there was the sharp clatter of a plate dropped upon a stone floor, and a man's startled exclamation cut short in the middle as though in recollection of the great need for quiet. Certainly the sounds had little to do with the bustling arrival of travelers. There was

nothing of the laughter, the hum of voices, the orders called and the hastening feet which belonged to the ordinary humming activity of a busy inn.

Although it was well situated with its front door upon the very edge of the post road leading north from Branscomb, and its back garden looking upon a broad blue reach of sea, custom was no longer very great at the Blackbird Inn. Travelers indeed were very few anywhere during these difficult times in the years just following the war of the Revolution. Once the highway leading north from Boston had been busy with mail riders and coaches, with packhorses and creaking carts, for Branscomb was no inconsiderable port and had been known for its harbor and its ship building throughout the colony of Massachusetts. Yet to-day there was nothing of this, only the stirring of uneasy feet and a sense of danger and disquiet in every sound drifting out from door or window.

Suddenly a man spoke in the passage. His voice was deep, with, under its low tone, a wavering edge of desperate anxiety.

"He has passed safely through the night, but what is the day to bring?"

The more softly spoken words of a woman followed:

"Ah, what can save us now?"

Nicholas, hearing them so close to the door called, though almost below his breath.

"Phoebe, Caleb, see what is here."

They came out together upon the step, Caleb Harmon, a broad-shouldered man with a gray head, but with the ruddy open face of undiminished health and strength. Phoebe, with her smooth hair, placid, gray eyes, and gentle expression was an odd contrast to his breezy vigor.

"There is a storm brewing," she said as she stepped outside.

She was shading her eyes with her hand to look across

the garden, for the sun, just then, was bright behind the haze. Then both were intently silent for a moment, for it was plain that they also were staring at the footprints in the white frost.

"As I live," Nicholas heard Phoebe say to herself in a wondering whisper, "here is good fortune come to this house at last. I always knew that it must return out of the sea, whither it was carried away."

"Good fortune?" repeated Caleb. "You are over-hopeful, Phoebe, to read any sign thus. It is high time that some better chance should come our way; but it is my belief that all good luck has fled from this household forever."

Nicholas looked down at his shabby breeches, then glanced up quickly at the window of the room just overhead before he voiced his agreement with Caleb.

"It is true that we have need of good fortune," he said, "but how can it come out of the marsh where no man dwells and from the sea where no ship lies? It is more than likely that these are the footsteps of a thief who stole up to look in at the window and went trudging away again when he saw how little there was within."

"If it was some one peering in," said Caleb, his anxious tone lightening a little, "I believe that I can tell just what it was that he saw. If he came toward morning, as the sharpness of these footmarks would seem to show, if he stood close to the window—and look, he must have done so for there are the two prints of boot soles in the soft earth of Phoebe's tulip bed—if he pressed his face against the glass, I think he observed a young gentleman with rumpled hair, sitting beside a table all set about with ledgers, accounts and legal documents. And he saw that the same gentleman had grown so weary of adding and subtracting figures which all told the same sorry tale, that he had laid before him a fair sheet of paper and,

with dawn coming in at the window and with the candle flame burning colorless in the daylight, he was drawing the picture of a ship."

"Did—did you see?" stammered Nicholas, and then chuckled in spite of himself, in unison with Caleb's deep rumble of laughter.

"I would require small wit to see from your hollow eyes that you had not slept, and I would need even less to guess whither your thoughts would stray before the night was over."

Nicholas colored with the quick flush of one whose feelings are apt to be cherished secrets and who is startled no matter how close a friend it is who guesses them. To cover the confusion which his words had produced Caleb Harmon added easily:

"And it seems that this chance of good fortune which Phoebe has foreseen for all of us, is about to take its flight."

The sun had come out for a brief moment through the haze, and under its warmth the delicate, short-lived hoar frost was already disappearing. Only beneath the plum trees and in the shadow of the hedge were the footprints still visible. The three stood watching as these also slowly grew indistinct and vanished. Even after Caleb and Phoebe had gone inside the house, Nicholas still stood staring at the place where the marks had been, as though he would conjure them back again.

The other two had been summoned by a rapping at the main door of the inn which opened so close to the highroad that the swaying, four-horsed post chaises would sometimes draw up with such a flourish that the leaders' prancing hoofs would be almost upon the doorstep. But since there had been no rumbling of wheels this was perhaps only a sailor come, even this early, up from the wharves where ships lay idle in these unprosperous times and through the town, where men without employment

walked the streets. He would be jingling two or three sixpences and copper pennies in his pocket and would come to spend what little he had upon Phoebe Harmon's far-famed cookery and her home-brewed ale. But no, it was not even so humble a customer as this, for Nicholas could hear Phoebe say to her husband:

"Make haste to open the door. It is John Ewing from the shipyards and he will wake the master with his knocking."

The grinding bolt was pushed back and the door was swung open, with John Ewing's quavering voice sounding at almost the same instant.

"I came to ask for news, Caleb, of good Mr. Thomas Drury. What is there to tell of him to-day?"

"Nothing but what you heard yesterday," Caleb Harmon could be heard answering. "The doctor was here at sunset and said that he was faring better than for a few days past. He says that there is now but little danger that our dear Master Thomas Drury should—go away from us."

"No, no, I do not mean that," John Ewing's voice was growing higher with anxiety, yet he was evidently trying to subdue it to a tone more proper for that house of sickness. "We heard that in the village yesterday,—that Mr. Drury would recover. Abner Hoxie, the town crier, was calling it in the market place just before the curfew. I came now to ask of Mr. Drury's affairs, of work in the shipyards, of all those things which concern us and our welfare. What tidings are there of them?"

"I can tell you nothing," Caleb answered briefly. "And do you think it is quite fitting that you should come to this place from which the shadow of death has only just passed, that you should be hastening hither so soon to be prating of money and the building of ships, and of all your own small hopes and fears?"

"It—it was not I alone, it was all of them, back yonder in the town, who bade me come," stammered John Ewing. "It is rumored that the work in the shipyards is to come to an end, and if it is truly so, then half of Branscomb must starve. These are desperate times, Caleb Harmon. If Master Thomas Drury fails us, whither can we turn? What can save us now? "

The man's trembling voice, rising high in terror, had uttered the same words which Phoebe Harmon had spoken fearfully in the passage not half an hour before. It was a direful question which found its echo also in Nicholas Drury's heart, as he walked in from the garden to that small room just inside, where, as Caleb Harmon had guessed, he had spent the whole night poring over accounts and ledgers, all of whose balances added up to one result—ruin. The cool freshness from the marsh and the sea streamed in past him through the open door; but could neither blow away the whole of the close heaviness of the air within, nor dispel the cloud of doubt and danger which seemed to hang everywhere.

The boy's uncle, Mr. Thomas Drury, had lain for some weeks, ill to the point of death, in the little bed-chamber just above, under the eaves. He had been lodged there, rather than in the best room at the front of the inn, for here the sound of the sea could come in through the window. Drifting up through the town, there came also the pleasant noise of busy hammers from the shipyards of which Thomas Drury was the well-loved master.

He had lain in a stupor for the most part of the time, only occasionally opening his eyes, and saying to Dolly Drury, the younger sister of Nicholas, his deft and devoted nurse, "That sound must not come to an end. Nothing matters if only that may go on. Tell Nicholas. Have you surely told Nicholas?"

He had spent his whole strength and had come near to giving his life also, that the work in those shipyards might continue. He was the great person of the town, since nearly all of the men worked in his boat yards, or made sails and ropes to rig the vessels which he built and which were famous all up and down New England. Such ships as he sent to sea on his own ventures were manned, also, by those seafaring men of Branscomb who could not stop ashore. Although he was the owner of houses and lands besides his shipyards, he had not gathered a great surplus of money wealth. He was content to be master of a thriving industry, to be loved by all of those whom he employed and to be looked upon, at the time the war of the Revolution began, as the firm upholder of the prosperity of that whole community.

It had been at the very outbreak of hostilities that the heaviest blow fell, as though with direct aim, upon his fortunes and upon the shipyards of Branscomb. Although Nicholas was then many years younger, he was never to forget that night of wild uproar when a force of British ships had dropped anchor in the harbor and, having picked up a fisherman in his small boat, had sent by him the command, "Let all the dwellers in this town leave it within the hour, for it is to be destroyed by cannon fire." In those days the conventions of war demanded such a warning before bombardment could begin.

The stout-hearted Branscomb folk had refused to flee, even though the force of Minute Men belonging to that region had, by chance, been drawn away to a muster at the north end of the county, leaving the town almost unprotected. The shipwrights who remained had snatched up weapons of every sort and had offered obstinate battle. Nicholas, only eight years old then, had stood at the window of an upper room in that big house beyond the

town where he and his sister dwelt with his uncle, and had watched the red flare of burning boats along the waterside and had listened to the steady boom—boom—boom which meant destruction at every thundering report.

At last, quite unnoticed in the general confusion, he had slipped out of the house and had taken his way along the road to the village, hurrying ever faster and faster, with the light of the fires growing brighter and the noise of the fighting louder as he came near. He had found his way through empty streets, to the rocky open ridge which looked down upon the shipyards.

The fire from the British vessels seemed to be aimed at that special space of ground just below him, where cannon shots were destroying derricks and hoists and were dropping amongst the piles of lumber with one splintering crash after another. On account of the choppy sea in the harbor, however, much of the marksmanship went wide, and struck harmlessly along the rocky shore of Branscomb Head. Nicholas saw more than one big, round iron ball go skipping and bounding past him, as he crouched below a great sheltering boulder and saw a band of sailors, who had landed from the ships, come pouring over the wharves. But there were men with rifles posted in the shelter of boats and scaffolding, who met the invaders with such a volley of well-directed bullets that they faltered and stood wavering. The broad-shouldered, burly officer at their head roared to them to "Come on, there is but a handful to withstand you."

Of a sudden, not a rifle ball but a stout oak billet thrown by who knew what hand, came hurtling through the fire-lit space and dropped him like a stunned bullock. His men, without their leader, broke and ran in every direction, two of them even scrambling up the ridge and stumbling past close to Nicholas in the dark.

"Too much like Lexington," the boy heard one mutter to the other, as he stopped for a moment to look back at the smoke and lights and the seething turmoil below.

Thomas Drury, steady and unruffled, had gathered his men, and had succeeded in mounting and loading four of the serpentine cannon which had been brought the day before to arm the vessel then building. With these he now opened fire, hastening the retreat of the landing party to a wild rout and finally, by well-aimed shots, even forcing the retirement of the war vessels lying in the harbor. Yet before their departure, the British had managed to cut loose the vessels at the Drury wharf, five of them, goodly ships and new built, almost ready to take the sea as privateers. The enemy towed them out to sea and scuttled them, and then made sail for Boston, leaving the Branscomb shipyards full of splintered wreckage and with the vessel on the ways pierced by three great holes through her deck and hull.

Not until the last sailor had taken refuge upon his ship, not until the blazing fires had begun to die down, did Nicholas have knowledge of anything save the surging tumult below. Then he became suddenly aware that he was not alone in his lookout upon that rock-strewn ridge. Only a few yards away, almost in the shelter of the same boulder, a very tall man was standing, so intent upon watching what was going forward that he was as unconscious of Nicholas as the boy had been of him. An instant's upflaring of one of the fires had lit his face for a moment, a darkly handsome face with high color, great slanting eyebrows, and with, just now, an expression of fierce and exulting triumph. To see him standing so close, to know that he was one whom his uncle had called a friend, Darius Corland, the man second in importance to Thomas Drury himself in that neighborhood of town and farming country—it was this

which frightened the peering boy far more than the thudding impact of cannon balls. He crept noiselessly away and for a long time kept the secret of that sudden vision untold to any one. It had passed so quickly, had so resembled a bad dream and was so little to be explained, that he could make nothing of it.

The brief and sudden raid had resulted in no very great loss of life, and the next morning every man able to lift a hammer was at work again. Thomas Drury was directing as calmly as though the brush with the British had scarcely broken his night's sleep. The vessel on the stocks was ready for sea hardly a week beyond the appointed time and went forth duly to fight for her country.

"She sank her good share of King George's shipping," Caleb Harmon loved to tell Nicholas. "She had accounted for a round dozen before she went down off the Bahamas, three months before Yorktown."

Such destruction, however, as that single night's work of the British ships had accomplished, was a very great loss to fall upon a single owner. "We have declared war, we must endure its fortunes," Thomas Drury said and went forward with his building. With half his best men under arms, with his gathered wealth growing less and less, he still managed to send ships to sea through the whole of the Revolution. It was not so much the hazards and destruction of warfare which had wrecked his prosperity, it was the disastrous period which came afterwards. In the efforts of a war-torn country to establish government on the basis of that new freedom which no man was used to and which many loudly doubted, the first results were confusion, disharmony and dire poverty for a great mass of the people in the new United States.

Valiant Thomas Drury, looking daily more worn and pale, kept a brave face and labored early and late in his

countinghouse down beside the wharves, striving to keep disaster at bay, and to provide work for those men who, in those difficult times, felt that their only support was in him.

Nicholas, now almost nineteen, labored as best he could to help his uncle; but in those intricate matters of dwindling money, of debts and mortgages and bills of exchange he had, as he knew himself, only the smallest of understanding.

He observed anxiously that Mr. Thomas Drury held long councils with a certain man of law, Joseph Ryall, and with his one-time friend, Darius Corland. Once the boy had tried to tell his uncle of seeing that same Mr. Corland watching the fight from the hill, but Thomas Drury had made light of such a tale.

"You must have been mistaken," he insisted. "Darius Corland tells me that he was away in Salem that night and arrived home too late to be of assistance to us."

Whatever were the results of those conferences, Thomas Drury wore always the same look of steady courage, had always the same words of hope and determination to the very end.

That end came upon a stormy evening when he tarried so late in the countinghouse that Nicholas went to seek what delayed his home-coming. He found him all alone in the great empty room, the candles burning low upon the table full of papers, sunk down in his big chair with his head upon his breast. His eyes were closed, his cheeks were flaming with fever and he was muttering to himself. Even the broken and confused words of delirium bore the same burden. "We must go on."

Some passing infection had taken fierce hold upon his worn frame and was wreaking its unchecked havoc.

With the help of Caleb Harmon, the foreman of yards, Nicholas carried his uncle out of the dark, chilly count-

ingroom. The big house beyond the town was out of reach on that night of wind and rain, so Thomas Drury was conveyed to the Blackbird Inn, there to be nursed through long, dangerous weeks by the devoted care of Phoebe Harmon and of Dolly Drury. The fever waxed and waned, relenting a little, then falling upon him with redoubled fury, seeming bound to destroy him in spite of all that could be done by those who so greatly loved him.

Meanwhile, that ruin which he had so courageously kept at a distance was now marching forward in terrible array. It was left for Nicholas to deal as best he could with the debts and contracts, with all the disheartening reckoning of that long struggle against too heavy odds. Former friends had all fallen away; there was no one to whom the boy could turn for honest counsel. Little Mr. Hugh Hollister, his uncle's usual legal adviser, was only agonized and despairing when Nicholas appealed to him.

"Who ever could have thought that Thomas Drury would come to this," he would exclaim, fairly wringing his hands, and could offer no comfort or suggestion of what should be done.

Yet the more Nicholas toiled over the accounts and records of that last desperate year, the more he understood how gallant a fight had been waged by Thomas Drury; and the more heart-breaking it seemed that such a battle must end in disastrous defeat.

It was over the ledgers, letters, notes and agreements that he had been working for the whole of that night, since now a decision must at last be made. His long adding and dividing, ciphering and hoping had brought evidence of only one obvious thing to be done, to declare the business bankrupt and the work of the shipyards ended. That it would mean tragedy and want to half the town he was very well aware. Yet there seemed no other course. In the gray, cold hour when heavy night is

turning to dull morning, he had laid a sheet of paper before him and had begun to write out a notice to be posted upon the gate to the yards and the docks, for information of the men who had toiled in faithful loyalty, ten, twenty and thirty years for first one Thomas Drury and then another.

“Let it be known that the work heretofore carried on in these shipyards, on the docks, wharves, vessels and on all property belonging to the estate of Thomas Drury is now finally declared closed and finished—”

Here he had been unable to go on, to write the last words and to sign his name. Instead, he sat long in deep and bitter thought, and at last, in very weariness of effort, he fell to dreaming of happier things, took up another sheet of paper, and, as was his habit when his wits were drifting anywhere they would, he began to draw the picture of a ship.

Had he, perhaps, as he sat there absorbed in thought, heard a faint fumbling at the window, as though a hand had felt of the fastenings, to push it open, and then had drawn back?

As Nicholas stood outside in the morning sunshine, looking at the last fading traces of the footsteps in the grass, it seemed to him that he did have a vague memory of some such sound. But there was no use in thinking of it now; whoever it could have been had come and gone, and even the last fading traces of his footsteps had quite vanished.

It was high morning now, but with the sunshine disappearing, hidden in the thickening haze. John Ewing had trudged away, to take back to the waiting village what little news he had gathered. Nicholas heard him go, walked across to the table and sat down once more to his task. Here was that unfinished document to which he must once more set his reluctant hand. “—now de-

clared closed and finished." He must write the last words and sign his name.

He could see, with such cruel clearness within his mind just how the notice, posted upon the gate, would be read by the first comer; how he would run back to tell the rest; how they would all come crowding about to peer and wonder and to repeat that desperate cry. "Ah, what can save us now?"

Some one, looking over the shoulder of another would say, "That is the writing of young Master Nicholas. We had hoped that the lad might help us!"

How could he, at nineteen, do what his uncle had not been able to accomplish? No, there was no blame to rest heavily upon his shoulders, only grief and regret which seemed heavier still. His racing thoughts had no mercy, for they fell to picturing for him, also, the proclamation of the town crier whose duty it would be to announce abroad so important and disastrous an event as the closing of the shipyards. He could see old Abner Hoxie come striding down the street, his bell clanging, the flapping tails of his shabby, homespun coat blowing about his long, thin legs. He could imagine him stopping in the middle of the market square, where all the townspeople would come flocking about him to hear the slow jangling of his bell and to hearken to what he was to say.

Nicholas had watched Abner Hoxie going up and down in that same attire, ever since he himself had been a little boy. He had heard that enormous voice over and over, and had always been reminded, when he listened, of the deep croaking of the biggest frog in Red Pond. What would it be to hear that great voice now crying out the desperate secret which, so far, was hidden amongst the papers on the table and in the heart of that sufferer upstairs.

"Oyez, oyez, oyez. It is to-day made public that Thomas Drury, Esquire, of this town—"

Once more he could not go on. At least, he could take up that drawing to which he had let his mind wander the night before, could crumple it fiercely and carry it to the fire to drop it upon the flame. He must make no more such pictures; for now he could never again hope to be a builder of ships. Yet the paper was still in his hand, when he paused suddenly, his head lifted to listen, his attention caught by a rising tumult of noises outside.

There was a rumble of wheels coming from the direction of the center of the town, and with it the sound of an amazing uproar, shouts, the trampling of feet and the thud of flying stones.

"Stop him," thundered a big voice, still at a distance, but carrying even from afar.

A woman's shrill cry followed. "There, he is turning into the lane."

Nicholas stepped quickly to the door, still open upon the garden. From the highway which passed in front of the inn, there branched a small, rutty cart track which led down past the marsh and ended at the very edge of the graveled beach. This byway skirted the garden close to the inn, but was hidden by the tall hedge. A crowd of people seemed to be hesitating at the corner where the lane separated from the post road. Nicholas, also, hesitated for a moment, not knowing whether the tumult, whatever it was, would pass in front of the house or down toward the marsh. At a sound of crackling among the hawthornes, however, he ran down the garden past a great intervening clump of lilac bushes to come face to face with a man who had broken through the hedge and stood for a moment panting and looking desperately about him.

He was not tall, but was quick and lithe. Nicholas' single glance took in his rough, dark outer coat, with a glimpse of color beneath it, and the whiteness of fine linen, observed also his ruffled bare hair and thin, black-

eyed face. Perhaps it was because the boy had recognized that great voice shouting beyond the hedge; perhaps it was because, in that instant of impression, he felt that here was one who was more friendless, more hard-pressed and more hopeless than himself, that he spoke so promptly.

"Run close to the hedge, where no one can see you."

He motioned toward the low shed at the corner of the garden, built close against the hawthornes.

"The door can be seen from the house but there is a window at the back. And inside there goes up a ladder to the loft where the hay is."

"*Merci, Monsieur.*" The stranger flashed him a quick and extraordinarily brilliant smile. He was as light and swift as a hare as he ran to the shed, flung back the swinging wooden shutter that covered the window and made an effort to lift himself over the sill. Whether because he was hurt, or merely spent with the chase, he seemed unable to muster the strength, but slipped back, and stood for a moment holding to the window ledge.

Nicholas was at his side in a breathless second. The sounds beyond the hedge were nearer and louder, and again the great voice rose above the others.

"Remember, a hundred pounds if you lay hands upon him!"

"Quick," ordered Nicholas under his breath, as he crouched below the window. "Your foot on my shoulder. There, you are in."

The Frenchman swung himself up and was over the sill. He perched there for a moment, poised, looking down at his unexpected ally with that same flashing smile.

"You are Nicholas Drury?" he asked.

The boy nodded.

"Drop within," he cried desperately. "They will be through the hedge in a moment."

"Not in one moment, at the very least three," returned

the other breathing a little fast, but with a manner quite unhurried. "In all fairness I must tell you this, my so impulsive friend. I have heard of you in the village, of you and your uncle who are in some distress, and that it is Monsieur Darius Corland of the big voice yonder, who could save you if he would, but instead, is pressing you hard. Is it not so?"

Nicholas nodded but made no answer, so frantic was his desire that the other should cease speaking and disappear.

"No, before I partake of your hospitality, this one thing must be clear," the man insisted. "If you should go to this same Darius Corland and say to him, 'I can tell you where is hidden Etienne Bardeau and can bring you to him,' he would, in gratitude, do anything for you that you could wish. You have only to yield me into his hands to regain all which you seem to have lost."

Nicholas stared up at him open-mouthed, but only in wonder. Then his face lit with a smile that matched the Frenchman's own. "And you think that I would do it?" he said.

"I did not think you would," the stranger answered, his black eyes dancing. "But now we understand each other."

He dropped out of sight below the sill, just as the boy swung the wooden shutter to. Inside, he could hear the man's feet going quickly up the ladder to the loft.



CHAPTER II

A CHAISE AND FOUR

For a whole minute Nicholas stood motionless below the shed window, listening, not to the clamor in the high-road, but to the faint sounds within, to make certain that the fugitive had got to a place of safe concealment. Then the boy, as swift and nimble as he had just been tense and still, ran along the line of the hedge, slipped into the inn and, with as much of an air of unconcern as he could assume, came out before the front door under the swinging sign. Here the whole household of women had gathered, drawn by that strange and approaching uproar. Just as Nicholas came out upon the step, he saw the shouting throng which had come up the street under the elm trees, now stand hesitating for a moment at the turn of the way and then go pouring down the narrow lane which led past the garden. Amid the excitement, his coming was quite unnoticed as he ran out to join them.

At this hour Caleb Harmon and all of the other stout artisans of the town, shipwrights, riggers, rope and sail

makers, were setting steadily to their day's labor; so that here were only the men of lesser employment or of none, very busy now, however, at the task of tracking down a suspicious-looking stranger of whom some one had cried, "Stop him." There was also a handful of women who had deserted their stalls in the market square, and a scattering of sailors from the cargoless ships lying at the wharves. Even though it was market day, here were all the folk who could drop what they were doing or saying on the instant, and give chase when the hue and cry arose.

The rumbling of wheels ceased abruptly as Nicholas saw a post chaise draw up at the head of the lane, with its four sleek horses stamping and plunging under the sudden reining in. The way was too rough and narrow for those high, yellow wheels, but, from under the leather hood there peered forth a flushed face, and that same great voice which had carried over the hedge now called again:

"Do not let the rascal escape you."

At the sound the horses jumped forward, and the driver was forced to give his attention to quelling the whole restive four. A flying stone, thrown by the inaccurate hand of red-armed Molly Green, grazed Nicholas' cheek; but he paid no attention and seized the shoulder of a man in a sailor's coat who was hurtling past him.

"Will you tell me what means all this ado?" he shouted to make himself heard above the din.

The sailor was so much smaller than the long-armed Nicholas that he was unable to jerk himself free; but he fairly danced in the road with rage at being detained.

"Let me go, Master Nicholas Drury," he shrieked. "I almost had him. There's a hundred pounds to whoever lays hands upon the rogue."

"Who is the man?" Nicholas insisted. "And who has told you that there is a reward for taking him?"

"Mr. Corland says so. Yonder he is calling from the chaise. He says—"

Another of Molly Green's haphazard missiles had caught the small sailor on the shin, which he fell to rubbing and for a moment would say no more.

The foremost of the pursuers had scattered across the inn garden, had tried the door of the shed and found it locked, and had come back to stand irresolute in the roadway. "If the fellow has got into the marsh, there is no hope of finding him," Nicholas heard some one say.

The sailor's high-pitched excitement had dropped a little, and he spoke finally in his natural voice.

"The man came through the market square," he began to explain, "buying supplies for a ship, I should judge. French-spoken he was and he paid for his purchasing with a good gold *louis d'or*. I heard it ring on the table of Gaffer Hindle's stall. Then came Mr. Corland driving over the cobbles and raises a cry, 'Lay hands on that fellow; there's money offered for his capture.' But the Frenchman was as quick as a grasshopper, and dodged in and out and was away up the street with no one of us able to put a finger upon him."

"And whose hundred pounds was Mr. Darius Corland offering?" demanded Nicholas. "Do you think for a moment, Timothy Tripp, he would offer his own?"

"N-no," hesitatingly admitted Tripp. "But he shouted so quickly, and the man made off with such speed, that first one ran after him and then another and—and—"

He looked at the group now gathering about them, as though begging some one else to go on with what was proving an awkward explanation. Molly Green undertook to continue the tale but with little better success.

"I had turned away for a minute's talk with Dame Hindle and, when all the shouting arose, I thought, as sure as I live, that the man must be making off with

my fresh eggs. But I bethink me now that I had sold them all before he came."

"Robert Norton, sitting on the step of the barber's shop, cried out that he had seen the man snatch Timothy Tripp's leather money pouch out of his hand," volunteered another woman. "Was it true, Timothy? How much did he rob you of?"

"He took no purse from me," declared Tripp, "and he would have got only twopence and a bad shilling if he had. Nor did he have the look, somehow, of a man who would snatch silver. No, I only saw him running and ran with the others."

By this time Mr. Corland had quieted his horses, had given the reins to his groom, and was striding down the muddy lane toward them. There was a little murmur and then quiet as he approached.

"King" Corland, a very few dared to call him—behind his back. This was not a title of honor, but the term given to those who had leaned toward the side of King George during the Revolution and had given no help in the war for liberty. In other districts these men were being harshly treated by their unforgiving neighbors and many had left the country. But no one in Branscomb could say or prove that Darius Corland had done other than hold himself aloof from both sides of the struggle, and so the man had held his ground. He was, indeed, one whose very appearance would cast a shock of cold water upon the zeal of would-be assailants,—a tremendous figure, so tall that it was scarcely noticeable how heavily he was made. Under his great brows, his eyes had a piercing look before which many a man was prone to stammer and fall silent. He was dressed always in sober luxury, with spotless ruffles and braided coats that fitted with never a wrinkle. His walk was a proud swing which just fell short of an arrogant swagger.

"Have you let him get clean away, you prating fools?" he stormed at them all, as he came near. "Well, it is your loss that you have tarried to talk when you might have had your hands on a hundred pounds."

"Do I understand that it is you who have offered the money for his capture?" asked Nicholas Drury, since the others stood saying nothing.

"No, not I myself. The man is a dangerous trouble maker, known in two countries, whose governments would both pay well to lay hands upon his evil person. An English prison or a French one, they are both gaping for him."

"So?" cried Tripp. "I thought it was an enemy to our own country we were pursuing. If I had caught the fellow, I was to wait until that King George, whom we all love so well here in New England, should pay me the money, eh? Or the King of France? And was to risk having my head knocked off into the bargain? Why the man had a cutlass too! We have done well to escape without harm. You put the matter on a very different footing, Mr. Corland."

"But the man is a public enemy," exclaimed Darius Corland. "He goes about stirring up evil notions for the upsetting of governments—"

He stopped suddenly, evidently in realization that his words were somewhat ill-advised.

"Indeed, sir," Timothy Tripp caught him up instantly. "You forget that you are in such company, where the upsetting of governments is considered no very evil thing. Some of us have had a few words to say against over-tyrannical rulers ourselves, and have struck a few blows in that cause. And will strike them again, sir, yes, should King George wish to reopen the question of which he had seemed to have enough."

The little man looked very fierce as he spoke, gazing far upward as Mr. Corland towered above him. No one

laughed, however, for Timothy Tripp had done his brave share in the war of the Revolution and had been an able sailor and fighter in spite of his lack of size.

Others of the group in the lane murmured and grumbled and shot black looks at the tall, richly dressed gentleman who had roused them to such excitement to no good purpose.

"He has made fools of us, after all," muttered Molly Green.

None of them were quite so daring, however, as Tripp; so that they all began straggling away, some looking shamefaced, some laughing together. Timothy Tripp, whose courage seemed suddenly to wilt, turned abruptly and followed them, so that Nicholas and Darius Corland were left alone in the lane. The gleam of sunshine had been short-lived; for now gray clouds had gathered overhead and the fog had shut down, hiding all sight of the sea. A spatter of cold rain began to fall upon the two who stood each looking in the other's face, the boy with an expression of steady defiance, the man with a glance of cold dislike, neither of which could have been born in that single moment.

"I am not done with the fellow yet," Darius Corland announced. "It is my purpose to send the constable to search the premises of the inn, for the man must be hiding somewhere. Since your uncle is, for a few days more at least, the owner of these grounds, I suppose I must ask you whether he has any objections."

"You know well that he is too ill to say yes or no in the matter," Nicholas returned. He thought of Joshua Barstow, the fat, short-breathing constable, and felt certain that worthy officer would never attempt to climb the ladder to the loft, particularly at Darius Corland's bidding. "I can say for my uncle," he therefore added, "that any person you may bring can search whereso-

ever he chooses. But why"—a quick afterthought had come to him—"why is a man sought for by the kings of France and England to be hunted down and arrested by a Massachusetts constable? Of what is he accused in a free country?"

"I can find sufficient accusation against him," returned Darius Corland. "If the fellow was clear of crime, why did he run when the cry went up to put hands upon him? No, I can give proper reason why he should be laid by the heels in the town jail, and at least I shall make it so hot for him that he will never show face in Branscomb again."

Some glowering thought seemed to fill his mind, but he put it aside to proceed harshly.

"I know that Thomas Drury feigns illness to escape worse things. And as for you, young Nicholas, you are an arrogant lad and singularly blind to your own interests. If you would serve me, instead of always resisting me at every turn, you would find it far better for your fortunes."

He strode off to his waiting chaise, while Nicholas took his way slowly back to the Blackbird Inn, with never a single glance down the garden toward the shed. His mind was oblivious to everything at that moment, save his desire to steal out and have word with that black-eyed stranger lying in the hay. But he must give no clue to the man's place of hiding, and would have to wait, with what show of calm he could muster, until the energy of the search had died away.

He went into the house and, fearing that his uncle might have heard the disturbance in the lane, he mounted the stairs to the sick room hastily. But as he passed the door of the bow-windowed front chamber, he observed a girl on her knees before the fireplace and stopped to ask:

"Whatever are you doing, Dolly?"

She turned about quickly to look at him with dancing

eyes. There was a glint of something in Dolly Drury's expression which was not mere liveliness nor mischief but, whatever it might be, it was a thing no person, once seeing, ever forgot. Her eyes were browner than her brother's, and her hair, lying now in rings upon a forehead damp from brisk toil, held in its color hints of bronze and of gold. And her face was such as some one of gay fancy might expect to see perhaps in the depths of a magic-haunted forest, peeping out from behind a tree bole, not the face of a dryad or gentle wood nymph, but that of a bold and saucy faun. Her vivid, gay spirits seemed in no way cast down by the trouble which hung over the whole household, nor by her task, which was that of polishing the tall brass andirons.

"We are making preparations for a great event," she said to Nicholas. "Our good friend, Mr. Darius Corland, has just sent his groom to say that he will condescend to rest under our roof to-night, if he can be sure of having better lodging than any one else. So, if there is a pewter plate that is not shining, or a knob of brass in which he cannot see his noble face, the eye of the great man will of a surety fall upon it."

"And what harm if it does," demanded her brother impatiently. "What care we for what Darius Corland sees?"

"We care much," returned Dolly, wisely, "even though we do not hold him in such high regard as he believes. We do not wish him to say that the Blackbird Inn has fallen into slovenly ways and is suffering from the bad influence of the Drury fortunes. Phoebe has enough on her shoulders, with all of us dwelling here and so little payment. I must even help her where I can."

"Then let me polish the brass," offered Nicholas, but she shook her head.

"Uncle Tom has been asking for you," she told him, "so you must go in to him. I am almost done. Mr.

Joseph Ryall, the lawyer, is to meet our dear Darius here, and they will sit here by my clean-scrubbed hearth and drink their cherry toddy and toast their toes and plan for our undoing, bad luck to them."

She was sitting upon her heels now, and pushing her hair away from her forehead with the back of her wrist, all the time looking up at Nicholas with such a glance of piercing inquiry that he said hastily.

"What will both Darius and Joseph Ryall say about the streak of soot on the side of your nose?" and, as she stooped to peer at herself in the bright mirror of the polished brass, he hastened away to his uncle's door.

In the peace and quiet of that little room under the eaves, away from the scant passing on the highroad, with the only sounds the faint hammering and sawing of the shipyards, and the slow wash of the waves on the beach, Mr. Thomas Drury was struggling slowly back to life. His own will, and the supporting devotion of all those about him, seemed to have been the forces holding death at bay, rather than any vestiges of strength left in that tired, wasted body under the blue and white coverlet. Thomas Drury's gaunt, clean-cut face had that transparent look which comes with desperate illness; but there was the spark of unquenched spirit still in the blue eyes which he opened as Nicholas came in. He spoke so low that the boy had to lean over the bed to hear.

"Everything—the ships, the building, the men—everything is going well?"

"Yes, Uncle," Nicholas tried to put into his tone all the strength and energy which the other's voice had lacked. "Everything is going—well, indeed."

The two exchanged a look of complete and affectionate understanding. Neither of them had believed in the outer meaning of what he himself or the other had said. But below the surface each had spoken the truth.

That which was going well was the trust and regard which each had for the other, the loyalty and belief between them which nothing could destroy. The look which the man bent upon his tall nephew was one of encouraging confidence; while the boy squared his shoulders and felt more of a man for having seen it.

Nicholas walked to the window and stood looking out upon the marsh, whose sober browns and russets, with tawny or amber-colored streaks here and there, would, before so many weeks, be changing to the pale yellow-green that marked the first beginnings of spring, and would be alive with the whistling red-winged blackbirds which had given the inn its name. Not even the narrowest stretch of sea was visible now through the streaming rain and the curtain of gray fog which had shut down so close. Branscomb Head, stretching far out to sea to the southward, and Pelman Island, opposite the window, were both hidden. The gravel bank rising at the far edge of the marsh might have been the last barrier at the very end of the world.

Wrapped in that blanket of mist, there must surely be a ship lying off the beach, waiting for the fugitive now hiding in the loft. How was he to be got safely away and carried out to that vessel? That was the question over which the boy was knitting his brows and bending all of his wits. To wonder what the man had done to be hunted down by the long-armed power of two countries, what crime he might have committed, was a matter which never entered the mind of Nicholas Drury as he stood at the window staring out into the wet, gray morning.

His uncle seemed to have dropped into a doze, evidently not having heard or heeded the tumult below and therefore not in need of explanations. The boy tiptoed to the door, stepped outside and closed it softly. He heard the noise of arrivals below, for Darius Corland, bringing

the officer of the law, was wheeling up to the door in his chaise, and giving orders to every one within reach of his commands. Such was the proper fashion for a man of his special kind of greatness to arrive at an inn.

He was obeyed wherever he went, with respectful promptness rather than with any whole-hearted enthusiasm of service. People of Branscomb were fond of drawing contrast between Thomas Drury, their foremost citizen, and Darius Corland, who stood nearest to him in material worth.

"Mr. Thomas Drury is the friend of all of us," the town and country folk liked to say. "Mr. Corland has great wealth, but what use does he make of it? He spends it on glossy-skinned horses and embroidered coats, or puts it into shrewd outlay which brings back profit to himself and to no other. But Mr. Drury's prosperity, which we help him to earn, comes back to us again."

People said also that Darius Corland would have liked well to spend some of his wealth in buying property from Thomas Drury, in especial that big, red-brick, white-pillared house two miles beyond the town where, before his illness, Mr. Drury had been dwelling with the fatherless and motherless two, Nicholas and Dolly. Those persons who know all that is passing in a small community said that Master Drury had, in spite of many offers from Mr. Corland, steadily refused to part with that pleasant, elm-surrounded mansion built by his father, the founder of the shipyard.

To-day, as he dismounted from his chaise, many were Mr. Corland's instructions to the constable, Joshua Barstow, who heard them all without reply. The mild, plump officer of the law, however, presently set about making a conscientious search of the whole house, even, on Darius Corland's insistence, climbing the narrow stair to tap at Thomas Drury's door. He came down

again in as much of a hurry as his stout person ever attained.

"Mistress Dolly bade me be quiet and be gone at once," he whispered to Nicholas and, since Mr. Corland chanced at that moment to be receiving the lawyer, Joseph Ryall, no further mention was made of that unfriendly errand.

Having at last proved beyond a doubt that no hiding enemy was to be discovered within the four walls of the inn, nor behind the settle in the common room or under the four-post bed in the best chamber, nor within the big oven built into the kitchen chimney, the not very eager Joshua set out, with a sigh, to explore the hiding places of the garden, where the cold rain was falling ever more heavily.

Nicholas was relieved to see that Darius Corland, who had followed the search all about the lower rooms, was now content to let the affair go on without his aid except for a stream of commands shouted from the back door.

"Beat all the bushes thoroughly," he called, disregarding the fact that the process sent down a double shower of raindrops to deluge the unfortunate constable. "Go all the way down to the Marsh Road."

He had demanded that the key of the shed be given to Joshua Barstow, and, "Make sure you search every corner above and below," was his final order, as Barstow, his round face red and dripping, came splashing up the path, pronouncing the garden quite empty of Frenchmen.

As he stood by one of the kitchen lattices, Nicholas held his breath for fear he had been mistaken in his confident belief that Constable Barstow would never climb the shaky ladder to the loft. The officer tramped around the corner of the low-roofed building to set the big key in the lock of the door. The entrance to the little

stable was not easily in view of the kitchen window, so that Joshua was completely out of sight, for so long that Nicholas' anxiety grew to agony. The fat, gray horse munching corn in his stall could tell no tales, but suppose there should be a telltale rustle in the hay above, a betraying creak of the worn old boards? He stood clenching his hands within his pockets, trying not to stare too fixedly at the point where Joshua had disappeared, and from which it seemed that he could not withdraw his eyes. A soft touch on his arm made him jump with startled suddenness. It was his sister Dolly who looked at him with a spark of excitement in her eyes, but who merely said in a whisper:

"Come with me."

She led him through the kitchen entry, at the very end of the house, where by a long slanted glance across the garden, one could just catch sight of the door of the shed. It stood open and within it, thinking himself quite hidden from view of the windows of the inn, Joshua Barstow was sitting in great comfort upon the milking stool. He had evidently had enough of King Corland's peremptory commands and was taking his own time to rest himself in peace and quiet before he should pronounce the shed free from dangerous enemies. The good Joshua had been appointed to his office during the last year of the war, when all younger and more able-bodied men were carrying arms for their country. So honest and loyal had he proved himself, even though also a little slow and ponderous about the pursuing of his duties, that no man had the heart to suggest that another more nimble person should now take his place.

It was a full twenty minutes later, after time quite sufficient for even so heavily moving a man as Constable Barstow to have examined every corner of the shed, that he finally emerged and pronounced the search concluded.

"The fellow must have got away by the Marsh Road," he said, "and have been taken off the beach in a boat by his friends. A whole squadron could lie off Branscomb Head behind this mist and rain, with none of us the wiser."

Darius Corland received his words with a deep growl of disapproval, but he turned back to the fire saying to Lawyer Ryall:

"If I could have aroused the lazy, lifeless townspeople sufficiently, I would have had the marsh beaten from end to end. But at least the rascal will know now that he can never dare to come amongst us here again."

It was now the hour of noon, with all the bustle of preparing dinner for the two important guests and for the post rider who, once a week, came in from the North country, and stopped for a meal before he went forward with the mail for Boston. There was so much coming and going in the rooms which looked upon the garden, that Nicholas must still possess himself of what patience was possible, since he dared not walk across the lawn to the shed, lest some one would observe and wonder whither he was going. He was in the small back room, trying to set to work again upon the great books of accounts, when there was a knock upon the door and Nathan Stiles, the mail rider came in to speak to him.

"I have a message for you, sir," he told Nicholas, "leastways it is for your good uncle upstairs—may Heaven give him back to us well and sound again—and, I calculate, it is you who should hear it in his stead. Ephraim Haverall, up Piercetown way, says to tell you that he has been doing his winter wood hauling and he has for Master Drury four of the best-seasoned, straight, oak trunks you could ever think to see. Hew sixteen inches square, they will, and make the finest keel for a ship yet laid in New England. He can't write, Ephraim can't, nor tell the day of the month by the almanac; but

he sends word by me every season what oak and elm and pine he can supply for the shipbuilding, and Master Drury sends back orders for what he wishes to use. 'About the time you begin to hear meadow larks,' Eph says, 'you can look for my timber wains coming down from the north'ard road.' Shall I tell him to bring them in as he has always done?"

"Yes—no—" Nicholas stammered over his answer. The keel of a ship! What ceremony and rejoicing there had always been in the yards over laying down that first beginning of a stately vessel. Involuntarily his heart had risen at the words and had cried out assent, and then sank heavily in sudden remembrance. Yet he could not bring himself to speak the actual refusal.

It is true of every person that there is some special work to which his hand, mind and heart turns more than to any other. A very few never discover their best field of labor, and pursue indifferent things their whole lives long. Some do not find the right way until after years have been wasted. Nicholas Drury, however, belonged to neither class. He knew, from the earliest time that he knew anything of the world which toiled and teemed about him, that he must build ships. There was much in him of a dreamer, more of a creator. He had worked with hammer, chisel and calking iron among the men so that he might know all parts of the labor which went into a completed vessel. He had an accurate eye and hand for making the drawings which guide the modeling of a ship's hull; he had, already, intricate knowledge of the mysteries of sheer, curve of bow and stern, rake of masts and camber of decks, all of which determine a vessel's speed, buoyancy, and the safety with which she will carry men and goods upon the high seas. He had a mind for instant, clear-cut visions, so that he could look at the rough beams and timbers and see how they would

look when cut and fashioned to show the hull's first splendid outline; how the bare vessel would look when clothed with masts and sails and rigging, and how the completed ship herself, tall, white and alive, would at last sail away into the blue distance, carrying men's hopes and lives. Was it great wonder that he stood hesitating, unable to answer Ephraim Haverall's message with either refusal or consent?

"I must tell you later," he said lamely to the waiting Nathan Stiles. "Perhaps I may have opportunity to—to talk of it with my uncle."

He knew that there was really small chance of taking such counsel, yet in no way could he summon resolution to send abroad that message of despair which would be carried by a downright "No."

"I can take word to him when I ride north again," Nathan said. "And my respects to your good uncle, sir. There's not a man in the whole countryside but is lamenting his grievous illness. They come out of the houses as I ride by and ask, second for letters and news of the day, but always first for the special tidings, 'How fares Mr. Thomas Drury?'"

He went out leaving behind him a spark of good cheer in that message of regard from all the friendly folk up and down the North Road.

Presently feet went down the passage to the main door, accompanied by a muttering voice of discontent which could be none other than the constable's. Warmed and fed with an abundant dinner in Phoebe's pleasant kitchen, he was still not appeased, and as he stumped along the corridor and out at the door, he was grumbling his displeasure at being brought out into the rain to do Darius Corland's bidding.

"A plague on him—his whims and his fancies—dangerous characters, indeed! Who's to run back and forth at

Darius Corland's orders? Not Joshua Barstow! No, say I."

The front door slammed, while Nicholas, laughing aloud for the first time that day, set himself again to that endless reckoning of accounts. But in the end he made no further pretence, even to himself, that he was working; he was only biding his time.

The minutes passed, then an hour, then more. Since he had been awake the whole of the night, he began to be very drowsy as he waited for the inn to fall quiet. At last he told himself that he would not again look at the wag-on-the-wall clock until the sound of voices and passing feet had finally come to an end. The rain was pouring down steadily, a chill, cheerless winter rain, which would presently turn to sleet or snow. About the eaves the wind was beginning to whisper, and at intervals would drive the cold drops in sharp rattling against the window pane. By dint of sheer patience, by long gazing at the pages before him and turning one now and again, he wore away the hours until midafternoon.

Phoebe Harmon went through the passage, carrying wood to replenish the fire in the room where Darius Corland sat with Mr. Joseph Ryall. Nicholas took the heavy birch logs from her and carried them to the door where he stopped and knocked. It was not firmly latched and swung open at his touch so that he heard Mr. Corland saying:

"He need not think to cause me anxiety, this Etienne Bardeau, by showing his black-eyed face in Branscomb. But mark you this, he will not show it here again."

There was something in the tone, however, which lacked Darius Corland's usual firmness and conviction. Was it possible that he was afraid of that quick Frenchman who had fled from him through the market place? That, Nicholas reflected, was a surprising idea indeed!

He was bidden, curtly, to come in. The two were sitting at a table with papers upon it and steaming glasses, while the air of the room was blue with smoke from Joseph Ryall's long pipe. Neither spoke while Nicholas was laying the logs upon the andirons, but when he turned to go out, Darius Corland addressed him.

"Has your uncle, or any person with authority in the matter, come to a decision as to the final arrangement of his affairs?"

"Not yet," replied Nicholas briefly.

Joseph Ryall, a thin, pinched man with a shabby wig which looked too small, sat tapping upon the table with his fingers and regarding Nicholas with a far from agreeable smile.

"You know, do you not, that things cannot possibly go on as they are, that some conclusion must be come to at once?" he said.

"Yes, I know." Nicholas would have given the world to have some clever and ready answer for these two who were merely baiting him, but he could find none.

"Perhaps you are not aware," said Mr. Corland, "that your uncle, a few days before his illness began, had at last consented to part with his house, for which he had so obstinately refused my generous offers in time past."

This time Nicholas could only nod. He had come across a note to that effect in his uncle's writing. The fact had proved to him beyond any other how desperate was the situation. Darius Corland, he knew, had long been casting covetous eyes upon that comfortable, dignified dwelling, as though he felt certain that, could he once become its owner, something of its dignity and importance would attach to himself and he would at last become the most worthy man of the neighborhood.

"Although things are now not quite the same," Mr. Corland observed, "I am still prepared to carry the agree-

ment to an end. If you are acting for Thomas Drury, I will offer you what I offered him."

He named a sum, to which Nicholas answered quickly:

"That is not the amount put down by my uncle as the price agreed upon."

"It is what I offer now," replied the other coldly. "You can accept or not, as you see fit. And even you can understand that such an amount, liberal as it is, will do very little toward carrying forward the involved business of Thomas Drury."

"A sad tangle, a sad tangle!" commented Joseph Ryall, yet smiling so complacently that Nicholas knew how his lean fingers were itching to pick the bones of the Drury fortunes.

"I will let you know what conclusion—we come to," the boy said, and went out, closing the door behind him, but not quickly enough to avoid hearing Joseph Ryall's suppressed:

"Tee-hee, a bankrupt pauper brings in our firewood and tries to ape the manners of a lord!"

Running down the stairs and seeing Phoebe still in the passage he said:

"I will fetch more wood from outside," and made for the kitchen door.

"Not in all this rain, Master Nicholas; it will not be needed until morning," she protested, but he, seeing an excuse at last for getting into the garden, merely shook his head and hastened on. As he sped through the kitchen, he paused to glance into the larder, caught up, from the shelf, a round of cheese, a loaf of bread which he wrapped hastily in a napkin, and a jug of home-brewed ale. Tucking what he could of these spoils under his coat, he ran through the entry, making apparently for the woodhouse. Once out of sight of the door, he made a long compass all around the garden behind the

hedge and finally found himself below the shed window. He set his provisions upon the sill, swung himself up with ease, and dropped inside.

He stood still, listening intently in the dusky quiet. The gray horse in the stall shifted and stamped and finally looked over his shoulder with a questioning whinny, as though wondering why his friend, Nicholas Drury, did not come to his side with an apple or a carrot or at least a friendly pat. But sounds from above there were, for a little time, none at all. At last there was a soft footfall, and a faint, very faint ringing of steel.

Evidently the man above had no notion whether it was friend or foe who had entered below him, and was plainly preparing to receive an enemy with ready cutlass.

"Will he run me through in the dark as I come up the ladder?" the boy wondered. If the fellow were to be stricken with panic, such a thing might easily occur. He dared not call out to announce his coming. But an instant's memory of the light-hearted and perilous delay, while Etienne Bardeau set forth the advantages of betraying him, stilled any doubts in Nicholas' heart. He began to mount the ladder.

The loft was piled high with hay which rose in mountains all about the sides and left only a small clear space in the center of the floor. The wide opening under the peak of the roof, from which the wooden blind had been partly swung back, gave sufficient light to show a tense, waiting figure, with cutlass out and on guard, standing erect and ready, poised in the single spot where there was space for fighting. Not until Nicholas had stepped from the ladder and had spoken, did Etienne Bardeau drop the point of his weapon and come forward.

"It is you," he said. "I might have known from the lightness of your climbing that it was neither Darius Corland nor his friend the constable. Nor would that

soft-stepping rogue, Joseph Ryall, have come anywhere so close to where steel might be drawn upon him."

"You know Mr. Ryall too?" Nicholas asked, as he set down his offering upon a level mound of hay.

"*Mais oui*, I know them both well, and that they are a more precious pair of rascals than any one hereabouts probably suspects. They managed to do much to aid and abet the enemy while the war was in progress; but that small quarrel is over in spite of them and they can do little further harm. The two of them are in ever-present terror lest the tale of their past doings may come to light even now, and they are in equally vivid hope that trouble will break out again, and that there will once more be congenial work for their hands to do."

"I had never thought that Mr. Ryall had Tory leanings," said Nicholas.

"He is a closer-mouthed man than Darius," the other answered, "and has need to be, for he cannot dominate men as does his big friend, and must cajole since he cannot command. I have known of them of old. It is my business to go and come, to see how men are feeling and thinking and acting, and, where it is possible, to slip in a word to awaken this one here and that one there, to the vision of liberty."

He sat down upon the hay rather abruptly, while the boy put before him the food which he had brought, and, somewhat awkwardly, invited him to eat.

"You are a good friend indeed," the Frenchman said, "not only to rescue a man from the ungentle hands of your fellow townsmen—and women—but to remember that he might be starving besides."

He made a great show of beginning to refresh himself and took up the jug for a draught of Phoebe's ale, then he set it down again precipitately after a single taste. Even in the dim light it was so plain that he was making polite

efforts not to pull a wry face that Nicholas was forced to laugh.

"Your climate, and the strange liquids which you swallow so bravely are the only things in this good New England which I cannot learn to regard with affection," his guest declared. "My mother was English, so that I should have as much leaning toward your ways as I have ease in speaking your tongue; but there are a few tricks no man of French blood can learn. He will shiver in your northeast winds, and he will choke upon your strong drink."

He began breaking apart the loaf of bread while Nicholas, seated on the hay opposite him, began to make shy but earnest attempts to learn more of who this stranger might be.

"You have no need, surely, to preach the doctrine of liberty in America," he began, as a hopeful opening.

"No, but America has still to learn that it is one thing to win liberty and another to hold it. All the world is watching to see whether this great effort of yours is to live or die. As your cause prospers, so shall others begin to hope that theirs also may succeed."

Nicholas observed that he was not really eating, and also that the strength of his voice did not quite match the gayety and spirit of its tone. Yet the boy was so full of eager questions that he could not forbear putting more.

"Have you been treated, in other places, as you were here?"

The man smiled as though in memory of an entertaining incident.

"No, not in many places. It was, for instance, a whole year ago that I was last molested upon a wharf in your southern city of Charleston, whither I had gone ashore, and was now waiting for the boat which was to carry me to my ship. An officer from a British vessel in the harbor,

together with a company of sailors from his vessel, came tramping by and chanced to hear me speak in my own tongue to a Negro longshoreman from New Orleans. The officer stopped, looked at me with dislike and suspicion, and finally stepped close to shake a big fist in my face.

“‘Were you talking of me, you French spy?’ he roared and swung a blow at me that would have struck me off the edge of the wharf had I not been—ah—just a little quicker than he. When his men saw him fall they closed in about me, and my one-time friend, the black, being a fellow of no very bold heart, made off across the docks, his voice uplifted in terror. There was scarcely another person on the water front at that hot and sleepy time of day, and yet assistance came to me, help almost as unexpected and ready as yours. You are a friendly nation, you Americans.”

“Who helped you?” demanded Nicholas, impatient to know the rest, as the narrator paused.

“I had, earlier, taken note of a certain lad, a year or two older than you, I should believe, and with very red hair. He had been walking up and down somewhat aimlessly, looking at the ships, but apparently having no business with any of them. Now I was to notice him again, for he came flying into the midst of the group like a bolt of lightning, leveled one astonished sailor man with a blow on the jaw and dropped a second with a thump in the pit of the stomach. Together we stood off the others until my boat came up, and we both jumped in. He said that the British sailors had, as though by accident, jostled him as they passed, and that he was longing for reasonable excuse to return the compliment in kind. He told me further that he had come to Charleston seeking to take ship for—as he said—almost anywhere, and was quite ready and happy to voyage with me.”

Nicholas chuckled. "I wish I could have seen it," he observed. Then he added in more anxious tones, "What right could the British officer have to call you a—a—"

"A spy?" Etienne Bardeau smiled reassuringly. "Be of good cheer, I am far from that. I am only one who thinks that freedom for all men is as just a thing on our side of the sea as on yours, and who goes about trying to arouse men to see what are their true rights. Into my own land of France I am forbidden to come, under threat of death. It seems that my very humble words concerning liberty for all mankind have drifted so far as the ears of the French king, who has honored me by feeling a little uncomfortable on my account and has sent many of his stout gendarmes to seize upon me if they can. But they cannot."

He paused for a moment and then continued, "And in England, where I have also lived some years, they talk of me as too great a friend of revolutions for their taste and seek to cast me into prison."

"But here in America," pursued Nicholas, "surely you are safe with us."

"Yes, save when your countrymen grow a little overwrought," the Frenchman reminded him. "And who can blame them, for the times are difficult and none are sure what is to come to pass? I did not wish to use my cutlass upon those who had done me no real wrong, and so thought flight was the only course. Even here, though the law cannot well lay hold upon me, bold hands can, and would put an end to my free coming and going."

He had sat upright to relate his brief tale; but now he leaned back against the beam behind him and abandoned any show of eating. His cheerful talk went on for a little and then grew suddenly uncertain and halting.

"That little brown sailor, who so resembles a monkey,

and who was at the head of the chase—it was his hand, I think, which flung a stone and cut the back of my head rather more deeply than was quite—convenient to me. I have sought to stanch the blood which flows down under my coat, but without success. It is nothing, nothing, but I must crave your pardon, my dear young *monsieur*—I cannot partake of this feast which you have so kindly set before me. I seem a little sick and giddy—” his voice was stumbling, although he still strove to speak lightly. “It is only the passing—discomfort of—a moment, and would, without doubt, afford great pleasure to our friend Darius—”

Nicholas, with an exclamation of dismay, jumped up from his place and strode across to where Etienne Bardeau, still smiling, though with a very white face, had slipped back against a soft pillow of hay. But just as the boy was about to stoop over to take account of the other’s hurt, a sudden blow aimed at his head from behind assailed him with staggering violence.

He stepped back, throwing up his arm, but had no opportunity even to look over his shoulder at his unexpected antagonist; for a second blow sent him crashing against a beam so that he seemed to spin away into a dark well of space, full of fiery and whirling stars.



CHAPTER III

THE MARSH ROAD

From that brief blackness into which he had been plunged, Nicholas came drifting up again, to hear words spoken which still sounded a very great way off.

"It is too dark in this shadowy place to see aught plainly," Etienne Bardeau was saying. "Close the window, Michael, and fetch a lantern. I saw one below, hanging from a peg beside the door. We must have light to know what harm has been done."

"Have I murdered him? And your own hurt, Etienne, how grievous is that?" questioned a second voice, low-pitched and with an intonation so new to Nicholas' ears that, dazed as he was, he wondered at it dimly.

The Frenchman answered quickly, "That is no more than has come to me a score of times. But if this lad is really injured, it is a desperate business indeed."

Nicholas opened his eyes presently and blinked at the ruddy light of the small lantern which had been set upon the floor in a space cleared of hay. The fine dust floating in the air made a halo of tiny rays all about the red flame, at which he stared in dizzy curiosity before he bent his

awakening wits to look further. Then finally, lifting his glance, he saw two faces bending over him, that of Etienne Bardeau, and another, whiter even than the Frenchman's, and crowned with a shock of hair which, even in that uncertain light, showed a brilliant red.

"I thought, as I stole up the ladder and saw you leaning back in the hay with him above you, that he had done you some injury and was about to do more," he of the red head was explaining rather sheepishly to Etienne. "What a fool I have been."

"*Tiens*, you were as swift with your vengeance as though you were the brave St. Michael himself," replied the Frenchman. "But see, he is moving. Do not be so downcast, my good friend. I am grateful for your zeal, and I truly believe Monsieur Nicholas Drury has not come to any great harm."

Nicholas was, indeed, sitting up now, forced to hold his swimming head with one hand, but otherwise very little the worse for the sudden onslaught. He grinned cheerily at the red-haired boy whom Etienne now presented as:

"The lad whom I met upon the wharves of Charleston as I had but now been telling you. He has amply justified my account of him, that he is a swift striker and a very good friend to me. His only fault is that he is prone to forget he is possessed of the strength of Samson."

Michael Slade, the color coming back into his distressed and still abashed countenance, began a stammering apology. His clothes suggested that he was a sailor, yet his manner and speech were certainly not those of a man before the mast. Nicholas could not bear to let him finish, and stood up to show that he was able to keep upon his feet. "There is nothing to be sorry for," he assured his assailant. "Such a bump on the head could harm nobody greatly."

Michael explained how in the course of the day he had

come twice to the wharf in the ship's boat where he was to meet Etienne, and had waited long and anxiously for his friend. He had finally heard "from a little brown sailor" about a Frenchman who had fled through the streets from Mr. Darius Corland.

"I had to pull back to the vessel finally, feeling troubled but sure that no real harm had come to you," he told them, "but when it began to grow dark, I was more anxious than ever and I begged the captain to let me take the dinghy and go ashore to seek you. I landed in the cove above the harbor, north of Branscomb Head, where we had left you in the morning. As I came up the lane, a gust of wind brought me your voice from the window above. I slipped through the hedge, saw where you must have climbed in, and followed. I could hear that you were talking to some one and as I did not know whether you had fallen into the hands of friends or enemies, I came up the ladder without a sound."

"And the rest we know, my impetuous champion," Etienne finished for him, since the red-haired boy had hesitated when he reached that point. "A rush, a thunderbolt, the confusion of a moment—and Monsieur Nicholas Drury of one end of this country is introduced to Monsieur Michael Slade of the other. An acquaintance begun in such a picturesque manner should continue long and happily."

In spite of his lively tone, the last words faltered and grew indistinct, as he was forced to slip down into his former place and lean back against the hay, still smiling, though with a face ghastly pale in the lantern light.

"What use to talk more of me, when here is one really wounded," said Nicholas. "I did not know what to do for him; but at least I can fetch some water."

He descended the ladder a little shakily, but proving that it was quite true that he had suffered no real injury.

At the shed door, he filled the gourd dipper from the brimming rain cask and brought it to the loft. Michael was already busy tearing into strips the napkin which Nicholas had wrapped about the loaf and cheese. He washed the ugly gash under Etienne's black hair, laid a wet compress upon it to stop the bleeding and bound it up with a deftness quite surprising.

"It is fortunate that you have such skill in mending heads since you are so able at breaking them," Etienne observed cheerily, even through the pain of having the wound dressed.

Michael's spirits seemed to be rising to their more natural level.

"When you live on such a plantation as ours, sixty miles from a town and a doctor, it is necessary that some one should know what to do for a wound or an accident," he said. "My mother used to bandage all the cuts and broken heads, which, she said, was a woman's business. But since she had no daughter, she was obliged to teach a son to help her. No matter what sort of a combat had been going on in the slave quarters, she was always the one to patch up the wounded, and scold them all the time she was doing it. The big Negroes blubbered and groaned, and promised they would never, never fall into such quarrels again, yet always did."

The Frenchman looked quite easy and comfortable now, reclining in the hay which Nicholas piled, soft and sweet-smelling, all about him. Michael Slade sat down in the more open space in the middle of the floor, nursing the lantern between his knees, lest it set fire to the contents of the loft, and lest also a spark of its light fall through the crack of the window and betray their presence to any one outside. Nicholas, with his back against a beam and his arms about his drawn-up knees, sat in the shadows staring at them both, at the man's deep-set

eyes and square chin thrown into stark light and shadow by the lantern, at the other boy's vivid glance, the eager enthusiasm of his face, and at the flaming ruddiness of his hair, all showing in vivid relief against the blackness behind him. Through all their talk the sound of the rain drummed steadily upon the roof close above their heads.

How few words it seemed to take for each to make clear to the others how he came to be there. Michael's story was that he had lost his father some years before—his voice faltered a little as he spoke of him—and had found little happiness in the household dominated by an overbearing brother who had inherited the whole of the estate. During a part of the war the brothers had both borne arms with the South Carolina troops, Michael in the last years of the struggle, since it was only then that he could muster sufficient age.

After the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, the two had attempted to settle down again to a planter's life, but the old differences had reappeared; and, since their mother had now died also, the last bond to hold Michael to his home was broken. With a few gold pieces in his pocket, and with no very settled purpose in his mind, he had ridden to Charleston, stabled his horse at a tavern and gone down to the wharves to see whether or not he could carry out some vague desire for seeing further and more adventurous portions of the world than the pleasant green levels of South Carolina.

There he had fallen in with Etienne Bardeau and for a whole year had been glad enough to shape his indefinite purposes to the movements of the wandering Frenchman and of the ship upon which he sailed. It was not difficult to read in the glance which the red-haired boy occasionally cast across the circle of orange light to his comrade in the shadow, what close friendship he had conceived for that French adventurer in the cause of liberty. There

was in Etienne Bardeau a charm which it would have been difficult for any one of the nature and years of Michael Slade, or of Nicholas Drury, to resist.

Through the outward easy grace of the Frenchman's manner, there broke, not only the unquenchable gayety of his being, but also the eagerly throbbing spirit of one whose pressing purpose in life could never let him rest. Of the three, his story must have been by far the most enthralling, but it was the one most scantily told. Where his early life had been spent, whether his surroundings had been of one of high or low estate, of these he gave the two boys only the smallest inkling.

"I thought, as youth does, that all good things would come to me for the simple reason that they were my due," he told them. "But I fell to thinking and to reading the books of those men whose voices, in these last years, have been awaking the world. It has been a long error, the belief that might is the greatest force, and that the strongest must, as a matter of course, have the best. Little by little I fell to questioning whether I was really deserving of all the ease and comfort in which I lived; I began to wonder in what way I was so much better than those gaunt, toiling peasants who battled for their lives against starvation in their small fields round about my father's dwelling."

He moved himself a little in the hay, and his black eyes, which could be either sparkling or fiery, now softened as men's do when they look upon the past.

"I was riding homeward one evening at twilight, planning pleasantly for all the pleasures of the morrow, when I passed an old peasant, carrying a great sack of grain. The man had a fine face, intelligent, gentle, worn with the long suffering of anxiety and too-great toil. He was old, so old that he tottered under the great burden of the sack, which was doubtless a goodly part of

all which his tiny farm had produced that year. It struck me, as a strange fancy, to wonder why I should be riding easily upon a fine horse, and he, who had wrought and toiled and made something in the world where I had made nothing, should be trudging along that rough road before me. As I came up with him, I slipped out of the saddle, on some impulse which I did not myself understand, and said, 'Friend, let me carry that burden for you.' The look that came upon his face is one which will burn my heart to the end of my days. It showed distrust, bewilderment, then abject fear, all born of a thousand years of injustice and abuse. He gave a hoarse cry of terror and, leaving the sack in my hands, fled away through the hedge and disappeared into the twilight. He thought I was mad, or that I meant to rob him of that little which grinding rents, taxes and the endless demands of his overlords had allowed him to keep. I sought to follow, but he only fled the more swiftly, leaving me holding all of his worldly goods and feeling myself to be the useless, wicked blunderer which I so truly was."

The two boys were listening with silent intentness, waiting for the end of the tale. Michael told Nicholas long after that this was as near as Etienne, in all the year of their acquaintance, had ever come to speaking definitely of his past. But the Frenchman had closed the door upon reminiscence and the rest of the story told them but little.

"Not all at once, but slowly, from that hour, I began to see the truth,—that the times of greed and oppression were coming to an end. The spirit of liberty is running like sparks through stubble and is flaring up, now here, now there. It cannot be quenched even in its smallest flame, for it is part of the great fire which with a rising wind will presently sweep across the world."

As he moved forward in the hay, the fire of which he spoke seemed to be shining in his face.

"I have gone hither and yonder, doing what seemed to me possible to stir men's hearts, to make the oppressors see their wrong, to make the oppressed less fiercely cruel in their intent to win their rights. I have known prison and escape, I have come in contact with all the secret arms of the law. I know where spies and traitors abide and who it is who is dwelling in one country and doing the service and pocketing the gold of another. It is thus that I have come upon the unbeautiful record of our friend, Monsieur Darius Corland, and of his share in your war just passed."

At that name Nicholas felt the leap of a memory many years old, the tossing glare of torches, the shipyard full of battling men, the crash of cannon and that dark face standing tall above him, illumined by the fierce anger which burned within, rather than by the red light streaming up from the battle and destruction below. He did not interrupt, however, and Etienne continued.

"He did his best to keep your struggle for liberty from coming to a victorious end, and his efforts are not yet concluded. He has instruction from his masters in England to do what he can to forward the discord and distress among the colonies and give them in London all news of it. He has orders also, I begin to believe, to lay hands, by any pretext, upon the person of one Etienne Bardeau, the friend of revolutions. And since he knows that I understand whence these commands come, he fears me as much as he hates me and at this moment, seated comfortably beside his fire under the safe roof of the Blackbird Inn, he is shaking a little in his stout, shining, silver-buckled shoes."

There was a silence, Nicholas thinking over what he had said, the others seeming to be waiting. At last the Frenchman said quietly:

"You have heard much of us both, Monsieur Drury, for we two have felt that we could trust you with all of

our knowledge. Now may we not hear something of you, and how you came, for instance, to be drawing pictures of ships between midnight and morning?"

Nicholas looked up quickly to cast a startled glance at his new friend. Yet before he could speak, a sound below silenced them all. In the intentness of their talk they had not noticed that the pattering rain overhead had almost ceased. The wind had risen and was bringing them, in intermittent snatches of sound, the splashing of feet in the wet and narrow lane, together with two voices growing plainly audible as they approached. Michael leaned forward quickly and blew out the light. All three of them sat utterly still to listen.

"There is nothing to be seen now." Nicholas recognized the harsh twang of Joseph Ryall. "Yet I could swear I caught sight of a spark of light behind that upper window. And see," he stopped almost below them, "there is a gap in the hedge and an open shutter of the shed where some one could have climbed in."

"Then in with you, after him." This was the heavier voice of Darius Corland. "It is still my belief that the man is hiding, like a water-soaked rat, down yonder in the marsh, but it were safer to look once more."

"I—I—can we not go in together?" stammered Joseph Ryall.

"No, that space is too narrow and too high for me."

The listeners overhead heard a scuffling as Ryall clambered up and came clumsily to the ground inside the shed. A long minute of hesitation followed.

"The villain's friends may have found him, and there could be half a score of murderers hid in this blackness," he quavered.

"Go on, you fool," stormed the man outside. "If I had not sent Tom Travers on another errand, we would know in a minute what was within."

Joseph Ryall commenced a stumbling progress in the dark, which came to an abrupt end in a great rustling and stamping, in the snort of an indignant horse and in a loud-pitched cry of pain. Plump Dobbin, an elderly steed of precise habits, had mistaken the early darkness of that stormy evening for midnight and had retired to his rest. He now came scrambling to his feet, lunging out in the blackness, whether by accident or with angry purpose, and coming into violent contact with some portion of Joseph Ryall's bony person.

"The evil brute has kicked me on the knee, so that I doubt not I am lamed for life," wailed the lawyer.

"Go on," ordered the unrelenting Mr. Corland. "There should be a ladder somewhere, leading up to the loft."

Under cover of the disturbance raised by Dobbin, Nicholas and Michael had crept to the head of the ladder. Without a sound, Michael had freed his cutlass from its sheath and stood with it ready in his hand.

"Give me a little space," the red-haired boy breathed close to Nicholas' ear. "I will pin him against the wall the moment he reaches the last rung."

A sudden shaking of the ladder at their feet told them that the man beneath had blundered against it in the dark. For what seemed an endless time they waited, the three above and the one below.

"There is nothing here," the voice beneath finally pronounced shakily. "I have felt to and fro, and the whole space is clear. If there ever was a ladder, someone has carried it away."

The fuming answer of Darius drifted up to them. "Well, since you are so fearful of the dark and a fat gray horse a hundred years old, come out and we will go farther upon our way."

With surprising ease and speed, the injured man scrambled through the window and spoke in delighted relief

outside. "As you said, the fellow must be in the marsh, and his ship probably stealing in to pick him up. We may see her lights from the Marsh Road. I will await you here while you walk down to look."

"You will come with me," growled Darius. In spite of vehement protest, the lawyer seemed to feel himself forced to obey. Their voices, apparently speaking in little harmony, grew inaudible in the distance.

Moving cautiously still, Nicholas and Michael stole back to their places, where they sat down in complete darkness now. Etienne Bardeau, speaking somewhat low, returned to his question. It was as though experience had taught him that no time was to be lost in furthering his knowledge of a new friend.

"I repeat that what we know of you, Monsieur Drury, is very little. What I heard in the village concerning you and your uncle and the shipyards which you own was not enough. Adversity makes quick and sudden friendships, even as it also makes sudden partings. May we not all understand each other once before we scatter again across the world?"

Nicholas drew a great breath. Shyness held him back; but the darkness and the easy friendliness of the strangers tempted him forward. He began very lamely. "What is there more to tell, beyond what you have heard?" Then, with an outburst of frankness born of all that the other two had told him, he went on, "It is all, except that things are worse for my uncle and for me than any one in the town could have told you. The chances of war and, still more, these difficult times following the war, have ruined many things and amongst them the shipbuilding of Branscomb. It has been one thing—and then another, and now there is nothing more. The Drury ships will never put to sea again."

His words were growing uncertain and he fell into abrupt

silence. Etienne Bardeau stirred in the hay as though he were leaning forward to peer at him through the dark.

"You take the misfortune very heavily, my young Monsieur. Disappointment in such early years as yours should not be so terrible a disaster. Is a matter of money earned or lost a thing to break one's heart?"

"It is not the money." Nicholas was glad that there was no light by which the others could see the pain upon his face. "It is the ships, the ships which my uncle and I were to build together. I must build ships: there is no other thing which I can hope to do even passably well. But no one wants them now. And the plans we had, the great things which we were to do!" He spoke very slowly lest his voice betray him. "They—are all—gone."

"I see." The Frenchman spoke very gravely. "That is indeed no easy thing to bear with courage. Even aside from what it means to you, this matter of the ships is a pity, a thousand pities. It is by ships that your country, and in especial this region of New England, can win to prosperity again. It is by ships that America will send to all the world her message that a free government of the people can rise to strength and power. At this moment, just such hopes for the future cannot be very bright here in your United States."

"They are not," agreed Michael. "Our Congress is weak and the colonies are quarreling among themselves. There are no laws. There is no money save in the hands of a few private persons here and there. It is no wonder that men are coming to ruin, both in this place and elsewhere. But what is to be done?"

"What is to be done?" repeated Etienne. "Here in the grasp of New England there is one task very plain, the greatest service which she can offer to her country. It is to get her ships to sea."

"But how?" asked Nicholas desperately.

"In the face of mortal necessity, there is always a way to do even the impossible," maintained the Frenchman. "By brave striving you have earned the right to have your freedom; now you must earn the right to keep it. By plying your hammers, by hoisting your sails—so will you gather wealth and honor before the world. Here is wondrous opportunity! Yet because, at the moment, money and faith are lacking; because, in this place, the danger of ruin seems to have crept very close, for these things it appears that you can do nothing."

His voice had risen to reckless, ringing emphasis; but now he let it drop suddenly. There were other matters of which he must speak and now, in spite of certain evidence of weakness and pain, he continued. There was a business-like dryness in his tone as though he were taking up, perforce, a task which must be performed while there was still time.

"We must return, after a long round, to Darius Corland. It was to gain certain information concerning him that I have come to Branscomb. Do you have any recollection, Monsieur Drury, of a certain night in October of the year seventeen seventy-five, in the first season of the war?"

Nicholas had no need to ponder his answer. Every one in the town still talked of that blood-stained, fire-reddened evening, the night that the British burned and scuttled the Drury ships. Under questioning from Etienne, he gave brief account of that affair, but did not take the time to describe just how he had watched it.

"A great many have wondered," he concluded, "by just what chance it was that the English ships came on the night when our defenders were all at a distance."

"Questions long unanswered sometimes come at last to their reply," Etienne Bardeau said. "And I, too, have had in my mind, for many months, a query of my

own. Why should a certain man of your town have lately written a letter to the British authorities complaining, 'You have not rewarded me for the service I did you on that night of October in the first year of the American War. Now that the affair is ended, I look to have my just due?'"

"Who wrote thus?" exclaimed Nicholas. Yet suspicion, casting backward, stopped dead at the recollection of Darius Corland watching the British raid with the red fire-light on his face. "You have no need to tell me," he ended.

The Frenchman reached within his coat and drew forth a letter, folded very small and without the usual conspicuous red wafers and big seals. "This is our friend Darius' little message, written some months ago, to his colleagues in England, concerning that same engagement of which you have just told us. He reports, further, the present discord between the colonies, and speaks his pleasant hope that they will fail to form a government and will presently fall into war amongst themselves. But the burden of his missive is reproach that he has received such small recompense for his great services during the past war. And yet this brave Darius drew sword on neither side!"

"But how could the letter have come to you?" Nicholas insisted.

"Monsieur Corland is a crafty soul but not always a good judge of men. He gave his dangerous epistle into the hands of one whom he thought to be a trusty messenger; but he was abusive in his orders and grudging in the price which dishonor demands for its services. The man having, I grieve to say, no delicacy, first opened the letter and read it, as no true gentleman should have done. Then, falling in with me and thinking that I had done him some small service and that this would be a return, he

gave the paper into my hands. And I have heard that, later, in sheer bravado, he even dropped hints to Darius of whither his letter had gone. It was not kind, and also it was not wise. But I, not caring much to be concerned in these affairs of Monsieur Corland's, thought, when I next came to these coasts, I would return the paper to him, thus giving him a little fright and a wholesome lesson."

"You came to Branscomb for that?" Michael Slade asked, evidently having heard nothing of this matter before.

"I came for that, but thought that I would first make some small inquiry as to just what was this occasion of October in the first year of the war. By very brief talk in the market place, I began to have an inkling of what that affair was, and gave up my intention of giving back the document to a man who had betrayed his neighbors. But just as I was learning a multitude of interesting facts from a loquacious fellow townsman of yours, Monsieur Drury, one Gaffer Hindle, there was a rolling of wheels over the cobbles and the very man whom I had come to see cried out to the people to lay hands upon me. It was his clumsy way of getting his letter once more into his possession."

"But in a free country he could not have done you real harm," Michael exclaimed.

"Not by fair means, but he could have found methods less than fair," the Frenchman replied. "He has no cause to wish me good fortune."

He turned over the letter in his hand, smiling a little to himself as he regarded it. Then, as though on sudden impulse, he held it out to Nicholas.

"I give it to you," he declared, "a talisman against the evil eye of Darius Corland. It has been told me that the man has been pressing you and your uncle very hard; if ever he should seem to be gaining mastery of the situa-

tion, you have there a magic charm which should break his power."

With some hesitation, Nicholas took the letter and looked at it doubtfully, but, upon the other's insisting, "I beg of you, do as I direct," he put it slowly away inside his own coat.

"I do not like having it," he still protested. But Etienne persisted, none the less.

"It may do good in your hands; it can do none in any other place. Keep it safe from him, for he does not deserve to recover it."

It seemed useless to decline further. Nicholas, moreover, was eager to go on to a certain question, which had grown continually greater within him since the coming of Darius Corland and Joseph Ryall had interrupted its asking. It had sprung to his lips at the Frenchman's words, "How you came thus to be drawing a ship between midnight and morning?"

"Where," the boy asked bluntly, "where was it that you came ashore, to seek information of Mr. Corland? Did you land at the wharf where the other boats come in—or—or—"

He did not go on, and he somehow felt that in the dark the Frenchman had flashed him again that quick, unreadable smile.

"I landed in the cove north of Branscomb Head, at the foot of an unused road which led up past a marsh. I had been told that was the nearest way to a certain inn where Darius Corland often lodged and where he, or news of him, might be most quickly found."

"And you came before morning?" persisted Nicholas.

"It was only faintly beginning to be day when I walked up through a garden white with frost, under old plum trees wreathed with silver, and I was struck by the fact that, at one of the lower windows of the house a candle

was burning with the dawn already at hand. I came close, I even pressed my face against the pane and saw, instead of Darius Corland, as I had half expected, a younger person, sitting at a table covered with papers, some one who looked weary and haggard from long night watching, yet who at that moment was most happily busy in the making of a ship."

"What—what a fool you must have thought me!" observed Nicholas, reddening as he had done when Caleb Harmon had referred to that same occupation.

"I thought," answered the Frenchman gravely, "that here, where New England's future looked the darkest, was hope at last. For in this troubled hour it is in ships, and the prosperity which they will bring, that her hope and the great hope of this country must lie."

"I thought, long afterward, that I had heard somebody at the window," Nicholas said.

"I pondered whether I should speak to you or not. I even raised my hand to tap upon the glass. But in the end I thought your work was such as ought not to be meddled with. I stole away and turned my steps toward the village, with the idea, I will own, of finding out something of who you were from the talk of your friends. Yet it seemed to me that I already knew you, so much had I read upon your face as you sat drawing your ship and seeing a remote vision of whither she was to sail."

It was not possible for any of them to speak further, for Nicholas had made a warning movement. He had heard Darius Corland and his companion coming back from their expedition to the foot of the lane where it touched the edge of the marsh. Michael, moving without sound, pushed partly open the shutter of the window so that they might hearken the better.

"Do you think they went all the way down to the cove?" he questioned of Nicholas in an almost noise-

less whisper. "Perhaps they found my boat, though I tried to moor it out of sight below a jutting boulder."

"I do not think they went so far as that," Nicholas replied in a tone equally cautious. "They would never make their way through the ruts and water of the Marsh Road."

The wind had risen to even greater strength, and was buffeting and jostling them as it roared behind them from off the sea. Involuntarily they walked slower as they passed for a moment, in the shelter of the shed. They were talking now of public affairs and Joseph Ryall was giving voice to such Tory opinions as filled Nicholas with astonishment since, all through the war, that astute lawyer had been one of the loudest to raise the cry for liberty. Darius Corland was merely making more plain that attitude of which they now had such full knowledge.

"When will this game of fools end, this pretense of America's that she can make a government of her own?" Joseph Ryall was saying.

"Before long, you may depend upon it. The colonies will never stand together," Mr. Corland replied. "One by one they will drop away and come whining back to England to be made her own again."

"You are right, sir," returned the lawyer, his thin voice less audible than the other's.

It was Mr. Corland who went on. "The men who have been calling themselves patriots will find that they have a harder task now than merely to cry out 'Tyrant' and discharge guns. They have liked the war but little; they will find that they like peace and independence even less. Let them go on, let them quarrel to their heart's content amongst themselves. We will soon hear no more of those high-sounding principles of which they have been prating. They have neither the spirit nor the heart to defend that liberty to which with the empty

flourish of lying fools they once pledged their lives, their fortunes—and their sacred honor.”

What scorn there was in his voice as he stood still for a moment to drop these last words just below the window! Nicholas could scarcely forbear crying out in his anger, and he felt Michael quiver as he listened. The next few sentences were lost by a sudden gust in the windy blackness, but, as the two went on, the voice of Joseph Ryall came up in unconscious corroboration of the words of Etienne Bardeau.

“It is the lack of prosperity which will be the country’s undoing. Every shipyard in New England which closes makes a long stride toward the end for which we hope.”

It was as though the scathing words of Darius Corland had cast a spell over those two listening above him. Neither boy moved or spoke until long after the slamming of the garden door told them that the men were within the inn once more. When Nicholas stirred at last, the pair looked at each other steadily through the gloom, but neither commented on what they had heard.

“How far out does your ship lie?” Nicholas asked.

“Off the island, on the north side of the Head,” Michael answered. “It is a good enough anchorage even with this rising wind.”

“Did you come ashore alone?” pursued Nicholas, to which the other answered:

“Yes, the captain was not very willing to send the cutter to the wharf again.”

The boy of New England stood pondering a little while his companion waited. “The wind has risen greatly and the rollers come in very big across the mouth of North Cove. I think you cannot get back without another oar in the boat, nor should even that be risked for two hours more. The tide must be at the very ebb just now, and there is a reef not even the smallest boat

can cross with the water down and the wind up." He reflected for a little and concluded, "I will go back to the inn, lest my being so long gone should make talk, and the talk reach Mr. Corland's ears. When all is quiet, I will come out again to fetch you." And thus they parted until the tide should be right for them all to embark.

It was a fortunate thing for all concerned that Joseph Ryall remained to sup with Mr. Darius Corland that evening. Every one knew the reputation Phoebe Harmon had for her bounteous serving of the guests of the Blackbird Inn. The narrow-eyed lawyer watched Dolly who assisted with the waiting on the table and afterwards was not averse to boasting, among such men as would suffer him, that he had been served "by a lady to the manor born, who handed me my plate of fried scallops as though she were a duchess-in-waiting."

It is possible that, had Joseph Ryall known just what thoughts of him were going through Dolly Drury's mind as she handed him the pewter plate with its savory contents, even his thin, dried-up person might have shriveled a little under her fierce scorn. But Dolly, when she set out to do any task, threw all her heart into doing it magnificently well. She took certain pleasure to-night in serving these two unwelcome guests with the manner of a princess in disguise. Since Phoebe gave her so much help in the nursing of her uncle, she, in return, offered all the aid she could in carrying on the work of the place. She savored her labors with such an oddly flavored combination of capable skill, dignity, and high spirits that the few guests which the hard times afforded all declared that they would ride across the whole colony for the sake of partaking, at their journey's end, of the pleasant hospitality of the Blackbird Inn.

After supper Mr. Corland and Mr. Ryall fell into a very absorbing game of cards, so that Nicholas, coming

down from his uncle's room, saw with relief that they were plainly settled for the whole evening. He was sure that with the bright lights, the warm cosiness, and the drawn curtains within, and with the steadily increasing of cold and wind without, there would be no one tempted to walk in the garden of the inn that night.

He hurried across the stretch of grass, followed the hedge for safety even in the dark and heard, as he went, the great breakers beginning to crash in thunder on the long crescent-shaped stretch of beach beyond the marsh. South of the marsh and north of the town, the brief interval of sand changed to rocks again, jutting out first in a short promontory which made the passable shelter of North Cove, then, beyond this little bay, running far out into the bold, granite headland which guarded Branscomb Harbor. Just off Branscomb Head was Pelman Island, and behind the island, riding safe in its lee, was, so he felt quite certain, the waiting French ship, invisible even as to her lights both from beach and harbor.

He had scarcely reached the lower window beside the hedge, when he heard the two within descending the ladder.

"Careful, Etienne," Michael was saying, as though his comrade was still giddy from that wound of which he had made so little. They came together to the opening beneath which Nicholas was waiting.

"So you are safely here," said Etienne, "and now it will be but the briefest time before these awkward guests of yours are off your hands and you can breathe easily once more."

Nicholas could speak freely aloud now, for the noise of the wind would drown almost any sound. Yet he seemed not to be able to frame the words in his heart, "I do not want you to go." Instead he only managed to stammer rather awkwardly, "I hope you have not seemed

to be waiting too long. It appeared to me that supper in the inn would never end."

"It was not so long," Etienne assured him, "although I observed that after your departure some strange blight seemed to settle upon my young friend here, who is usually a lad of gay and sufficient talk. The good Dobbin, munching in his stall, was almost as lively and loquacious company through these hours as Monsieur Slade. What has been ailing you, Michael? Why have you been so lost in thought that you scarcely answered when I spoke?"

"Nothing, I do not know what ailed me," muttered Michael. "Here is the stool upon which, as you told me, the constable sat to rest himself and which probably broke the lawyer's shins in the dark. Step upon it, and you are safe over the sill."

They trudged together down the lane, felt the full sweep of the blast as they came past the end of the hedge, crossed a ridge, and strode down into the hollow of the marsh. The rough roadway circled its edge and led them finally through a barrier of rocks and down to the round sweep of sand and the bit of sheltered beach. Nicholas had heard that it was in this place that guns, smuggled from England, had once been landed to help the colonies in their fight for liberty. It was only a vague rumor, a tale of some one who saw the heavy wagons and the toiling horses go silently by on such a night as this. Not even the town of Branscomb had ever been let into the true secret of their coming. But that winding cart track had been little used, save for just such hazardous and secret purposes.

Michael, feeling about for his boat, found it under the lee of a rock, not far from the edge of the water, which had ebbed away and was now coming in again.

"It is safe to light the lantern," Nicholas told him. "No one can ever see us from the village or the inn."

With little difficulty they got the dinghy down to the water and held her there, bobbing, with the lantern in the stern, so that Etienne Bardeau might embark. But just as he stepped forward and laid his hand upon the gunwale, Michael Slade, who had scarcely opened his lips as they walked down to the shore, now spoke suddenly.

"Wait," he said. "There is something that you must know. I—I am not going with you. I will row with you out to the ship, but I am not going to sail in her. Our voyaging together must—must come, to an end."

"Why?" Etienne straightened up and spoke in a tone sharp with momentary astonishment, but which softened instantly. "My dear Michael, what idea is this? You say that our seafaring together is done? Why?"

"I—I do not know," Michael answered. "I—it only seems that things are not the same after the talk we have had concerning our country's need, after those words under the window concerning—lives and honor. I have thought it out, sitting in the dark with you—and suddenly I see that I must stay. It has been an adventurous, pleasant life which I have led, voyaging about the world in your company. But I am really of small use to you. I am none to the cause which you serve. And here I feel suddenly that, though it is only a very little I can give, I may be of some use to—my own land. I do not understand, myself, just what has come to me."

"I understand it," Etienne spoke very gently. "I have seen a change here, a change there in you, during this last year. You were growing up, my good comrade, a thing which, in spite of your twenty-one years, you had not done before. It was in a boy's spirit of adventure that you carried arms in the Yorktown campaign; it was for a boy's hasty quarrel that you left your home; it was," here the words were spoken very low, "it was a boy's blind love that you have bestowed upon a friend

not so worthy as you have thought him. And now, first by degrees, and then in sudden awakening, you see as a man sees. You know that you must serve those about you rather than follow your own desires."

He stepped into the boat and set the lantern down between the thwarts. "On every day that I miss you, I will think of two good friends left behind, doing their utmost together to help America stand safe before the world. May I go, thus thinking of the two of you, Monsieur Nicholas Drury?"

Nicholas nodded. Such purposes—the defense of his country's beliefs, his small share in the upholding of her fortunes and her honor, these were things of which a boy of his sort would never be able to speak. "You—you may think of us so, together," was all that he managed to say at last.

With this statement Etienne Bardeau seemed quite satisfied, for he settled himself in the stern sheets without further words, and motioned to the two that they should push off. It was not difficult for the boys to launch the little boat into the spent rollers that washed into the cove; but, as they pulled stoutly into more open water, the wind and the great waves, advancing upon them out of the dark, caught them and flung them first high, then low, as though in tumultuous sport. Their oars seemed to have no part in their toiling progress; for, as they climbed painfully up one steep mountain of water, such rowing as they could do seemed of no possible aid in that precipitous ascent; and as they rushed breathlessly down into the next valley, they seemed to slide headlong, helpless, rather than moving of their own effort. The struggle was too great for any one to have breath or thought for talk, except for Nicholas' saying briefly:

"It will not be so bad as this for long. We will pull into the lee of the island in a moment."

Yet, scarcely had they struggled into the slightly quieter water, there fell upon them the greatest danger which had yet threatened.

Advancing suddenly out of the dark came a boat under close-reefed sail, a small, heavy-looking sloop, pitching and plunging, and bearing straight down upon them.

"What a clumsy helmsman she must have," thought Nicholas, "or is the man asleep?" He raised his voice in a great shout which the wind instantly carried away. "Port your helm; you will run us down."

The little vessel, like a ghostly apparition, swept by them, so close that Etienne in the stern might have touched her side.

"That was a close thing," said Michael, "and precious bad seamanship. Great Heaven, the fellow is coming about."

Around into the wind the sloop was indeed swinging, and now came sweeping upon them on another tack. As she came close they could make out that there were only two men aboard her, one short and with shoulders humped and bent before the cutting wind, the other very tall and thin, his ungainly figure plainly silhouetted as he stood up once against the background of the sail. She rose upon a great billow, while the three in the small boat were wallowing in the trough below. As her long bowsprit hovered above them it seemed certain that her bow would come stamping down, directly amidships of the dinghy.

It was the gigantic strength which dwelt so unexpectedly in the slim figure of Michael Slade which saved the three of them. One last ounce of extra effort he threw into a sweep of the oars; their small craft leaped forward; and once more the sloop slipped away into the dark.

"She cannot beat to windward now, to threaten us again," said Nicholas. "But who could be abroad in

such a night as this, and what purpose could he have in attempting our destruction?"

"Some friend of Darius Corland," observed Etienne dryly from the stern. "He has helpers in strange places. That broad man at the helm I have seen before. I believe he flinched at the last second, otherwise he would have had us."

They were moving through smoother waters now, although even here it took all the strength of both the rowers to go forward. It seemed very long indeed, that battling journey in the dark, with never a further word spoken until, after the better part of an hour, Etienne's voice observed:

"Yonder is the ship."

She was not a very great vessel, the *Deux Frères* tossing at anchor under the shelter of the island, but she loomed black and enormous above them as they came under her cutwater, looking far upward to see only the glimmer of a lantern here and there upon her deck. A single face peered, ghostlike and curious over the rail as the dinghy pulled alongside.

Nicholas remained, holding the pitching boat as the two climbed the ladder, wondering for one wild moment how it would be to sail away in that big dark ship, leaving all the doubts and perplexities, all confusion of duty and responsibility behind. It would be of no use, he thought, coming to himself with a sigh; no sails would be broad enough or wind sufficiently swift to carry him away from all that lay so heavy upon his heart. The unreasonably determined efforts of the little boat to dash herself to pieces against the vessel's timbers finally occupied all his thought and left him no leisure for fantastic dreams.

Michael Slade, a few minutes later, came scrambling down the ladder with a stout seaman behind him.

"The captain is not going to sail until morning," he explained, "and since it must take a little time to arrange my discharge, I will not leave the ship until then. But François and I will put you ashore now."

"Then take the tiller," directed Nicholas, "since you will have to row on the way out to the ship again." He could vaguely see Etienne Bardeau standing above, with his hand raised in a gesture of farewell, as they pulled away.

The iron-armed François, who had no form of speech, apparently, but a broad grin and a few friendly grunts, was an oarsman of such prowess that the little craft fairly flew through the water on the shoreward passage. She grounded easily at last upon the sand of North Cove and Nicholas laid down his oars and stepped out.

"Until to-morrow," Michael said briefly, seeming already to be busy with the task of getting off again.

"If you do not find me at the inn, I shall be at the countinghouse near the wharf," Nicholas answered, as the boat slid into the first big slapping wave and was gone.

Michael had not said that to have Nicholas present himself at the inn close upon midnight, accompanied by a total and unexplained red-haired stranger with a Southern drawl, might have excited more comment than would be quite comfortable, and that he would therefore appear in Branscomb in a more suitable and ordinary manner. Nicholas had not found it necessary to say that he understood, but he smiled to himself as at the thought that here was a comrade who would stand by him in large or small difficulties, with an understanding and a loyal heart. He walked away with swinging stride across the beach, up the Marsh Road and out over the ridge where the wind smote him. He drew great breaths of the wild, clean air, as though the very tumult of the gale was blowing away final difficulties and giving him

new strength. He hastened up the narrow lane, squeezed through the hedge and came once more to the door of the little room which looked upon the garden.

The fire within had been replenished and the candles lighted upon the table, though the books and papers lay undisturbed, just as he had left them. As he came inside the yellow light, there was upon his face an expression which had not been there for many a day past, a look of cheery calm and untroubled determination. All night he had sat over these baffling and discouraging documents, trying with all his might to come to the decision which he knew must be reached. Yet morning had found him, with the half-written proclamation put aside and with no real plan achieved. But now, in the haste and excitement of that tumultuous day, his mind had reached a definite resolve. He went straight to the table and took up the paper upon which he had been writing when the gray light of morning had driven away the blackness of night.

“ Let it be known that the work—in this shipyard, on the wharves, docks and ships—is now finally declared closed and finished—”

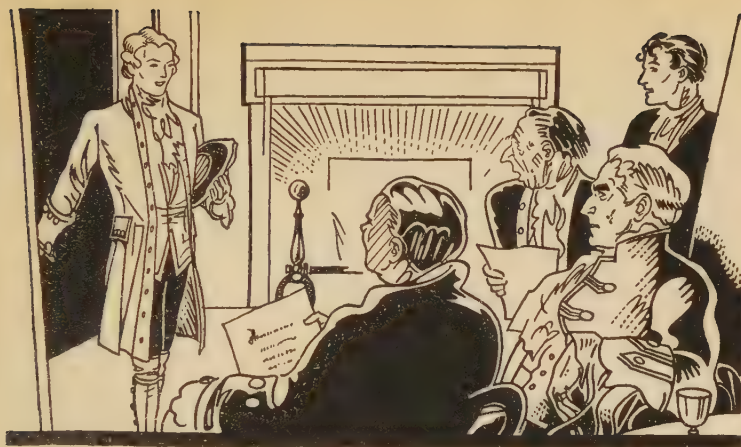
In his ears, as he had written, there had seemed to be ringing the town crier's bell proclaiming the same news in the market place for all men to hear, jangling out the knell of a hundred hopes. That bell should ring in his ears no longer. He strode across to the hearth and dropped the paper upon the fire, watching it grow brown and wrinkled and then burst into flame. Some of the words were still legible, wharves—ships—finally—

If America needed ships, then ships, somehow, she must have. The determination was the first thing, the means and methods must follow. Already he was beginning to have an inkling of how a great enterprise might still be undertaken. In his mind's eye as he stood

watching the paper shriveling in the blaze, there grew up a vision, swift, intangible, like the very flame itself. It was a dream of all that he would do for his country which so needed the help that men could give, a picture of stout hearts standing sturdily for brave beliefs, of busy hands and ringing hammers building up again the lost prosperity, of white-sailed ships faring boldly forth to sea to show all people what Americans could offer in lives and fortunes, in courage and spirit. Never, so long as he lived, could he have put that dream into spoken words, never could he have repeated that whisper stirring in the very depths of his heart—"our sacred honor."

He touched the pocket where lay the letter which Etienne Bardeau had given him. He would not use it; he had no wish to strike against Darius Corland, or any other enemy, with the secret weapon of conspiracy betrayed. No, he would battle by honest means against honest odds. To-morrow he would send word, by the postrider, that Ephraim Haverall should make haste to send down his oaken timbers; for a new keel was to be laid, forthwith, in the shipyards of Branscomb.





CHAPTER IV

"OF BERKELEY COUNTY"

The storm, which Phoebe had so confidently foretold in the mild sunshine of the morning before, was arrived in full, tempestuous strength when Nicholas awoke the next day. A tremendous wind was beating about the Blackbird Inn, making the stoutly fastened shutters tremble, singing through the keyholes and roaring above the chimney pots. There was little rain or snow; for the clouds overhead were being hurried past at such great speed that they seemed to have no opportunity of dropping their cold contents upon the buffeted world below; so that only now and then there came a furious rattling against the window of driving raindrops which were three quarters turned to ice. The plum trees were bending almost to the ground; but they had weathered a hundred storms like this and knew well how to bow, shivering, before it. From the beach there came the hoarse thunder of the gigantic breakers, while great spouts and columns of spray went up, from minute to minute, from the bar above the marsh.

"It is strange to me," said Caleb Harmon, buttoning

up his coat and turning up his collar, as he stood in the passage beside the door, "that sailor men, and those who spend their lives on the wharves and ships, study the clouds and the winds and with long and careful pondering hazard a guess as to what the weather will be, and are often wrong. And here is Phoebe who, with scarcely a glance at the sky, will tell you when a tempest is brewing and when it is not, and moreover will be right seven times out of seven."

Caleb and Nicholas were both preparing to plunge out into the storm about their several businesses of the day, while Phoebe, with her ample skirts all tucked up, was ready to give the stone passage its morning scrubbing.

"Why should it be any wonder that I should be weatherwise, and feel what others can only tell by reasoning?" she observed placidly. "Have not my people followed the sea from a time that history scarce remembers? Does not the sea get into the blood of a woman as well as of a man? Daughters can resemble their fathers just as well as sons."

Phoebe Harmon came of those who had been hardy fisher folk on first one side of the Atlantic and then the other, for generations beyond counting. Their small boats had plied the stormy waters about Newfoundland, had fished the Grand Banks and had sought shelter in the rock-walled harbors of the New England coast long before the Pilgrims had dreamed of a colony beyond the seas. Those of her people who had come to settle in Massachusetts had pursued the same calling, her father being master of a small fishing fleet which went out every year to be gone for months, gathering the harvest of cod and mackerel. Her mother, daughter of the Branscomb innkeeper, had managed that hostelry with a capable hand while "her man was away on the Banks." Phoebe, in her young womanhood, had been nurse to

motherless Dolly Drury; and it was while she dwelt at the great house that she had seen and fallen in love with the tall, vigorous Caleb Harmon from the north of the colony, who came down from the wooded mountains of the back country with great oak timbers for the ship-building. She had married him and gone with him into the wilderness, but after three years was back again, a worn, restless, thin Phoebe, quite unlike the fair, rosy maid who had gone so blithely away.

"She can't seem to abide away from the sound of the sea," Caleb had explained to Thomas Drury, "and, as I've had always a hankering to hew oak logs into something better than just square timbers, I have come to ask you will you see what I can do with a hammer or a calking iron, instead of an adze."

The result had been that, by steady and intelligent industry, Caleb had risen to be foreman of the yards and Thomas Drury's most trusted helper, and, in time, had become also the instructor of young Nicholas Drury in all matters pertaining to the fashioning of a stanch and sturdy ship.

"You build them so heavy," Nicholas used to protest sometimes, when he began to reach the age of real knowledge.

"They have to be heavy to be strong; that's how it's always been and we can't build better than our fathers, can we?" Caleb would insist.

Like her mother before her, Phoebe still managed the Blackbird Inn, though house and land chanced to belong to Thomas Drury. Her capable powers were in high repute all up and down the colony, but it was well known within her own household that while she attended with scrupulous care to the wants of travelers in coach or post chaise, she had always a more bountiful hand in the kitchen and a more careless eye upon the reckoning for

all brown-faced seafarers. She liked to watch them sit in a row on the sunny bench before the door and review their voyages storm by storm, calm by calm, and gunshot by gunshot. She, the quickest and most busy woman in seven counties, would often be seen to pause and linger that she might hearken to that deep-voiced, untroubled laughter which can only be heard when sailors sit together, and when those exchange greetings who have last met at St. Eustatia or Bilboa or Port of Spain. When Nicholas was still a small boy, he would come almost daily, from his uncle's house, to be greeted by Phoebe's quiet, welcoming smile, and to sit on the last unoccupied fraction of the sunny bench, munching the large, red apple which Phoebe had ready for him, and listening spellbound to the sailors' stories of those strange ports which they had seen, and of their stirring adventures as privateersmen warring against the ships of King George.

The mind of Phoebe Harmon was a strange combination of odd superstitions handed down through centuries of sea-going folk, and of a quiet, peaceful wisdom inherited, perhaps, from those same centuries of sailing upon the deep. That wisdom was never obtrusively offered to any person, but it was always at the service of those she loved. Between her and Dolly Drury there was an alliance of affection which neither time nor misfortune could ever hope to break. Mistress Dolly, pattering down the stairs from her uncle's room, heard the last words which Phoebe had uttered and seemed to meditate them for a moment with her head on one side.

"Daughters—as well as sons," she was repeating to herself, as she went into the kitchen. A moment later the door reopened and she thrust out a face whose eyes were dancing but whose expression was painstakingly serious.

"Nicholas, if you are going to see Mr. Hugh Hollister this morning, as you said upstairs," she suggested

solemnly, "mark well that Henrietta Sparrow does not overwhelm you with the hospitality of her entertainment. Since you will not take me with you, as you really should do, it is only safe that you should be forewarned of grievous dangers." Then the door closed quickly, as she vanished once more.

Nicholas grinned, and with Caleb Harmon stepped out into the roar and bluster of the storm. They bent and ducked as the first onslaught of the flying sleet drove into their faces, but they were soon in the more comfortable shelter of the winding close-built way called Pleasant Street. Nicholas stopped at a gray stone doorstep which touched the sidewalk and pulled at the highly polished knob of a jangling bell. Caleb, who was on his way to attend to the affairs of the shipyard, said only, but with the earnestness of a deeply anxious heart:

"I wish you the best of luck, Master Nicholas," and walked on.

The white-paneled door was opened abruptly by the hand of a spare, angular woman with pinched, unamiable features.

"Good morrow, Henrietta," Nicholas said to her; "may I see Mr. Hollister?"

She regarded him with a sourly inhospitable look and replied, "It is over early in the morning for him to be doing business, with his breakfast only just done. But perhaps he can see you for a moment."

"Come in, come in," called a heartily friendly voice from inside, and Nicholas was ushered into the small big-windowed study at the end of the hall, where Mr. Hugh Hollister, a short, rosy man with extremely white hair and small, bright eyes was sitting at a big mahogany table before the fire. Henrietta Sparrow closed the door with a peculiar sharp abruptness which was entirely her own.

Nicholas, with no waste of words, came straight to the point of his business.

"You know what straits my uncle's affairs are in," he began bluntly, "and how everything has seemed to point to the closing of the shipyards. Well, I have decided that the work must go on."

"A brave resolve," returned Mr. Hollister; "but how, my dear lad, is it to be done?" He pushed his spectacles up to his forehead and regarded the boy anxiously from below them. "As your uncle's legal adviser, I am privileged to know fairly well how desperately involved are his fortunes. Had he not fallen ill, it is possible that he could have managed to continue, but how it is to be managed now, I cannot say."

"If it were possible then, it is possible now," asserted the boy stoutly. "I have talked with him, the very little that he was able to hear, and he is with me in what I propose to undertake." He had indeed exchanged the conversation of a very few moments with his uncle,—all that the suffering man could manage. He was fortified now by the memory of how that white face had brightened in the illumination of renewed hope, and how his voice had whispered, "Do what you can, Nicholas. It is life to me that you should go forward." He proceeded to explain, now, what he hoped to do.

At the end, he brought out a paper full of orderly figures and laid it upon the table before the lawyer. "Here are debts," he said, "and here are assets. By selling all the lands and farms, or exchanging them for the acknowledged debts, we can still contrive to keep the shipyard and perhaps even the grounds and buildings of the Blackbird Inn. If that is done, I can carry out that further plan of which I have just told you."

"You would sell your uncle's house?" inquired the lawyer in astonishment. "Surely that can never be!"

"It was his own intention to do so," returned Nicholas, "He cares a hundred times less for it than that the ship-building should go on, and so do I. Mr. Darius Corland—"

Here he hesitated for a moment and the little lawyer repeated anxiously in his turn, "Yes, that is just it—the very marrow of the trouble—Mr. Darius Corland!"

"Do you not think," Nicholas asked slowly, "that he could be satisfied with giving up to him those houses and lands which he has often wished to buy?"

"It might be," agreed Mr. Hollister doubtfully. "It is true that Darius Corland and his satellite, Ryall, hold a large part of the debts and that they are disposed to have no mercy. But it is also true that Darius has great ambition to be a landed gentleman and will be greedy to lay his hands upon all these acres which your uncle has so long refused to part with. I do believe that if you and I should go together to talk over this matter with him and with Joseph Ryall at the inn, that we might come to some arrangement that will not mean ruin for you and the casting of all of Branscomb into dire want. I always regretted that your uncle, in his need for ready money, turned to those two. But it was even, as he said, that there was no one else of this neighborhood who had any after the war was done. Shall I go with you? Is that what you would like?"

Nicholas nodded beaming.

Mr. Hugh Hollister did not continue at once but studied the paper with lengthy and absorbed care. He knitted his brows over certain items, and ran his thin fingers through his fluff of white hair as he pondered over others. But at last he laid down the page and looked across at Nicholas as he said:

"We may be able to settle the debts. Then, with a brave heart and a strong spirit, this further thing may be done."

He rapped upon a bell which stood upon the table and, after waiting some moments without any answer, he tapped smartly upon it again. Henrietta Sparrow appeared suddenly in the door, an apparition as abrupt and not much more pleasing to the eye than a Jack-in-the-box.

"I was coming," she remarked tartly. "You are sitting in a draft, Mr. Hollister. You should have the fire screen moved, or put on your padded waistcoat."

Mr. Hollister smiled cheerfully and paid not the slightest attention to her instructions.

"I am going out at once with Mr. Nicholas Drury," he told her. "Fetch my greatcoat and boots, if you please. And first bring some refreshment for my friend."

Henrietta departed with a disapproving rustle of starched petticoats, and presently returned with a decanter of wine and so meager a supply of biscuits upon the blue plate which accompanied it, that Nicholas, striving to forget Dolly's parting instruction, was still scarcely able to cover his smile. Mr. Hollister regarded the decanter with disapproval.

"Henrietta, it was the Madeira I meant you to bring," he said almost sharply, to which his handmaiden replied:

"The Madeira is in the far bin and there is not time for me to fetch it, if you are going out as you say, and on such a day that no Christian man should step beyond his door." She bent upon Nicholas such a disapproving glance as told plainly why she had accorded him not even the second best wine and departed from the room.

"An excellent person," Mr. Hollister commented, with something of a sigh, after the door was closed. "She takes care of my bachelor comfort in a way that makes up for any little—little—whims she may show from time to time."

Nicholas politely gulped down what he could of the vinegary beverage which Henrietta Sparrow's reluctant hospitality had set before him, while he, like her, voiced

a protest against the frail little man's going out into the weather.

"No," returned Mr. Hollister, with that gentle but immovable obstinacy which mild people can show when the question is of right or wrong, "I would not be doing my duty by you and Thomas Drury did I suffer this matter to wait for an hour. There is far too much to be done to admit of delay. And besides," he concluded somewhat less firmly, "if we are to set ourselves up against the will of Darius Corland, it were better not to have too long a time to think about it. I always feel that we in Branscomb allow Darius to overawe us far more than is proper; but none the less, I am not too happy when he bends upon me that great, black-browed frown. It is one of the few mistakes I have ever known your uncle to make, that he could, at any time, have thought that Darius Corland was his friend. Darius is a friend to no man."

There was little conversation possible during their brief walk through the rain-swept streets, bringing them, both breathless, to the door of the Blackbird Inn. Mr. Darius Corland, already in conference once more with his close-haunting associate, Joseph Ryall, was so condescending as to say that he would see them, and so careful of his dignity that he forced them to wait a considerable number of minutes until the fact of his superior greatness might seem to be well impressed upon everybody concerned.

It was Dolly who brought the message that they were to come in at last, and who whispered to Nicholas as a conclusion:

"'Tis like an audience with royalty, or with a hanging judge, I do not quite know which."

Little Mr. Hollister seemed to incline to the latter view, for his genial face had become longer and more troubled as they waited.

"I doubt it is no use," he began suddenly, just as they came to the door; then checked himself. "Yet for the good of all, it is worth a trial."

Mr. Corland was standing by the fireplace, appearing bigger, handsomer and more sure of his power even than usual.

"Good morrow, Hollister," he said curtly. "Ryall and I have much business to attend to in the next hour, therefore I beg you waste no words. Why are you here?"

"It is, in fact, on a matter of business which much concerns you, Darius," chirped Mr. Hollister, seating himself, unasked, beside the table and striving to look at his ease. It was a pleasant pretense, but deceived nobody. Darius Corland turned to Nicholas.

"So, you are not bringing my firewood this time," he said, his big voice more harsh and cold than it had ever sounded before. "Does the boy have to stay, Hollister?"

"He does indeed," replied Mr. Hollister, plucking up some spirit. "It is he who will state our errand, and I am certain will state it well. Now, Nicholas."

Quite steadily and, to his own surprise, quite without any feeling of diffidence, Nicholas began to speak. He looked at Mr. Hollister, fidgeting and uneasy; he looked at the other lawyer, Joseph Ryall, grinning sardonically at each bold proposal. He looked at Darius Corland, leaning forward to give him that black look which, when he was displeased, settled like a dense cloud upon his dark, handsome face. A hanging judge—the term was well applied. Yet among those three doubting or disbelieving men the boy was quite untroubled. Was it the letter in his pocket, the talisman which the Frenchman had given him which had wrought such a change? It was rather the knowledge that Darius Corland, before whose tremendous will he, like every one else, had formerly felt small and inadequate, was truly no such great per-

son after all. The fellow was a shifty traitor, one, who moreover, had made such a clumsy blunder in his underhanded dealings that the proof of his evil doing had come straight into hands where it could do him the greatest harm. With such knowledge in his heart, Nicholas looked the great man in the eyes and spoke out bravely.

It was his purpose, he told them, to set at once to the building of a new ship, and the sending of her to sea. She was not to be his undertaking, or his uncle's, but the combined venture of all the town. Since there was so little money for the building—"Little, indeed!" sneered Joseph Ryall softly, while without taking notice of him Nicholas went on—since there was no great amount of money, he would offer to the shipwrights that they should work for a portion of their wages, and let the rest be repaid by their owning a share in the vessel. He would invite all in the neighborhood to take part in the venture of lading her and sending a cargo overseas. She would sail, not to those British ports, which American ships still sought, for the most part, from force of habit and from knowing the trade, but probably to Spain, France, or Italy, where there were less well-known sources of profit.

"Or even farther, if need be, to Smyrna or Constantinople,—anywhere for a new market," he concluded at last.

"Why not to Timbaktu?" mocked Joseph Ryall, when he had done.

"Or perhaps to the Fortunate Isles," suggested Darius Corland. "What crack-brained boy's talk is this! To build a ship out of nothing, place a little of everybody's goods in her hold and set sail for the world at large! Before we even discuss the impossibility of such a venture, turn your soaring wits, if you will, to the fact that your uncle's business is deeply involved in debt, for the most part to me. Also that I have come hither for the special purpose of demanding a reckoning."

He stepped forward from his place by the fire and sat down in the big chair by the table.

It was here that Mr. Hugh Hollister spoke up, his voice something of a twitter and his cheeks very pink, but with great evidence of determination in his tone.

"I have been over that portion of the matter with my young friend here," he said. "And it is my belief the debts can be arranged. There are certain properties which he proposes to turn over to you, Darius." He took up the paper and began to read. "The house and farm known as Drury's Hill; five hundred acres in Essex County—"

Darius Corland, like some great fish whose attention is caught by enticing bait, turned slowly from Nicholas to Hugh Hollister.

"The hundred-acre farm in North Middlesex County—"

"Let me see the paper," he said.

The three heads bent together over the page, while Nicholas, who had remained standing for all of this time, now sat down on the bench beside the fire. The others took no notice of him, nor did he of them, beyond thinking vaguely that Joseph Ryall's expression reminded him of that of a sly terrier waiting to snatch a bone over which his comrades are wrangling. It was the boy's part now to wait until his ally, Mr. Hollister, should have done with his share of the business. So he sat, clenching his hands, fretting, wondering, and hoping.

That plan of his which had seemed so gloriously possible as it had first come to him, bit by bit, bold hope after doubting despair, what did he himself think of it now? Some of it he had dreamed of for years; some had been part of a project talked over long since with his uncle to be put into execution "when the war ends." Some of it had only come to him in the tense darkness

of the past night. One portion after another of the idea had appeared out of the vagueness of hope or memory and had fallen into its proper place, just as plans do when the time for their maturity has finally arrived. It had seemed so triumphantly right when he had carried it to his uncle that morning. He had recounted it to him and to Dolly; and both had listened with excited enthusiasm thrilling to his own. But now, could he still feel the same about his treasured enterprise? Yet it would have had Etienne Bardeau's approval; it promised hope for the welfare of his uncle and his sister, it had the good of the whole community bound up within it. That thought steadied him, as nothing else could do.

A long time passed and the council around the table was drawing to a close. As Mr. Hollister had said, Darius Corland's greed for land and a position of consequence was overcoming his grasping purpose of the moment.

"Well," Mr. Corland exclaimed at last, leaning back in his chair, "if Thomas Drury consents to all this, it does seem as though some satisfactory settlement might come of it. And if this young fool wishes to cast away all his own and his uncle's estate by setting sail in search of the golden apples of the Hesperides, it is not our part to interfere. But here is one difficulty, Hollister,—the boy is not yet of age. A minor cannot make contracts or sign title deeds."

Mr. Hugh Hollister looked across at Nicholas with a countenance of misgiving. "Had you thought of that?" he asked. "You are not twenty-one."

"My uncle will presently be well enough to sign his name to the deeds," he answered. "And as for the contracts, it is part of my plan which I have not yet told you, Mr. Hollister, that I am to take a partner. He is not much older than myself, but he is twenty-one."

"And who may he be?" cried Hugh Hollister. "I

know of no one hereabout who could go into this undertaking with you."

"He is not from hereabouts," Nicholas told him. "He is from the South. His name is Michael—"

For the life of him he could not recall the rest of it. Certainly Etienne Bardeau had mentioned the whole of the name of the red-haired, fiery-hearted youth who had broken his head. But Nicholas had taken small note of the introduction. Michael he could never forget, yet Michael's surname was hopelessly gone astray. The three sat staring at him in disconcerting wonder, but he could not bring it back.

Joseph Ryall was just opening his lips for sarcastic comment, when there came a knock at the door, followed by Phoebe Harmon's voice saying:

"A gentleman come to ask for Mr. Nicholas Drury," and hard upon hers another, a soft, pleasantly liquid voice which observed:

"I reckon in such company he will be needing me. By your leave, Madam, I will go right in."

A figure appeared upon the threshold, taller than Nicholas, and buoyantly upright, dressed not in rough sea clothes now, but in a bright blue cloth coat, and buff leather knee breeches, with ruffles and buckled shoes and a waistcoat buttoned with silver. With an easy grace, entirely devoid of shyness, the newcomer advanced into the room, seemed to wait a moment for such introduction as Nicholas should have made but could not, and then, going straight to the big man glowering at the head of the table, said ceremoniously:

"Mr. Darius Corland, I presume, and I, sir, am Michael Slade of Berkeley County." Then as an afterthought that unintelligent persons might perhaps require something more he added—"in South Carolina."

Simple-hearted Nicholas was as thunderstruck as the

rest. It had not occurred to him that Michael had shore clothes in his sea chest, nor that they could turn him overnight from a seafaring adventurer to a gentleman of consequence. He was to learn later that what Dolly came to call "Michael's grand-ducal manner" could be put on and off as easily as the silver-buttoned waistcoat, and that at heart the boy from South Carolina was as unassuming, straightforward and simple as was Nicholas himself. But it was not for nothing that Michael had seen some of the great men of his day—John Randolph, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, and John Rutledge—gathered in his father's great parlor. He was not above borrowing some of their ceremonious and aristocratic deportment to use for himself when the occasion demanded. And certainly at this moment, when he and Darius Corland stood, each eyeing the other up and down, the young Southerner's grand bearing served him well.

Hugh Hollister found his voice before the others.

"Is—is this the partner you speak of, Nicholas?" he asked, and the boy, gathering his wits answered:

"This is he. Michael, I present you to Mr. Hugh Hollister, my uncle's adviser and our very dear friend. Mr. Corland, this is he who is to share the undertaking of which I have been telling you."

It was probably the first inkling which Michael had received of how whole-heartedly his offer of help had been accepted. He gave his friend a quick look of gratitude and without the slightest faltering of surprise he stepped into his new rôle.

"You may be certain that I understand what privilege has come to me," he declared earnestly to Mr. Hollister, while the little white-haired lawyer beamed upon him and introduced him, in his turn, to Joseph Ryall.

But the leaner, taller man of law had not allowed himself to be so greatly impressed. It is possible that behind

that ceremonious air he recognized the extreme youth of the stranger, and saw that in some ways he was even less mature than Nicholas Drury.

"As we are all concerned in this matter," he said harshly, "I have a right to ask you what you bring to this partnership beyond a high manner and a blue coat with a spot or two of sea water upon it."

"I bring loyalty and good will," answered Michael, "and a firm belief in the rightness and wisdom of what Nicholas Drury plans to do."

"But it is customary," pursued Joseph Ryall, drier and more biting than ever, "for a new partner to bring capital into a business. And especially would it be, at least, convenient for some money to be introduced into a business which hangs upon the brink of bankruptcy. Yet you do not mention any such vulgar thing as gold."

"Gold?" repeated Michael, looking bewildered for a moment. Southern planters of that day did not have a great deal to do with actual money, their wealth and exchange being reckoned in hogsheads of tobacco, bales of cotton, acres of land, or slaves. The idea of actual money entering into the transaction seemed not to have occurred to him. But in a moment he had recovered himself and replied with dignity, "It is no very great sum which I can offer Mr. Drury along with my services; but I can bring to the venture a hundred guineas."

"My dear sir, did you say guineas?" ejaculated little Mr. Hollister. With the whole country full of the valueless paper money which had, in itself, contributed to the downfall of Thomas Drury's fortune, the mere mention of gold was something quite extraordinary.

"Yes, guineas," Michael assured him with a smile, "good golden ones, stamped with an elephant and castle, and with a pleasant jingle as they clink together."

"There would be more worth in one of them than in a

whole bushel of paper," Mr. Hollister rejoiced. But Joseph Ryall put in the quick question:

"And have you any of this great sum with you?"

"No," admitted Michael easily, "and it will be necessary for me to take a journey to Boston before I can produce it. But until I come to him with my capital in hand, Mr. Nicholas Drury does not need to accept me as his partner."

He turned about upon Nicholas with a smile of reassuring comprehension of the whole situation and, perhaps, even a little satisfaction that his questioning at the hands of two men of law had, so far, gone so well. But he had still to reckon with Darius Corland, who had not yet spoken a single word.

"The sum you mention," Mr. Corland began now, bringing his slow, heavy words like a battery of artillery to the attack, "is very small when the venture calls for some twenty times that amount. Yet I congratulate Mr. Nicholas Drury upon having found any person in these United States to stand beside him in such an unwise undertaking. It seems that he has had to go somewhat far afield in his search for a fool of his own kind. May I ask how you reached here from your ancestral mansion in Berkeley County? Did you come by coach or on horseback, or, perchance, on foot?"

His keen eye had also searched out the evidences of extreme youth in the newcomer's face. Michael's appearance as a gentleman of grand manner could not hide his lack of years, nor could it supply that steadiness of bearing which only age and experience can bring. Darius Corland's shot had struck his weakest spot and had taken effect, as was proved by the hot flush of anger that mounted under the boy's fair skin.

"I came by ship," he declared, with a rather too hasty gathering of his threatened dignity.

"There has been no ship from the Carolinas in our port for many a day," returned Mr. Corland. "Nor can I think that such a figure as yours could have walked our streets for long without my having heard of it."

"She was a French ship," declared Michael hastily—too hastily as both the boys immediately realized.

"French," repeated Darius Corland very slowly, while he looked at the two in cold contemplation which lasted for minutes. Nicholas could seem to see his thoughts moving from the French ship to the Frenchman in the market place, from Etienne Bardeau to Michael Slade, from Michael to himself. The connection certainly did not seem to please the big man beside the table. It was quite clear to Nicholas that the train of suggestion went one step farther, from the Frenchman and the two boys to the letter which Darius knew to have been in Etienne's possession. As Mr. Corland's look went slowly from one to the other, it asked more plainly than uttered words, "Which of you has it?"

Nicholas Drury was very nearly at man's estate but he had only lately ceased to be a young boy. He had not yet acquired that manner which can hold its own against the powers of confusion. He could face Darius Corland undismayed but, under that coldly scrutinizing eye, he could not, for his very life, keep down the slow red which rose and crept over his face, a burning acknowledgment which said as plainly as words could cry aloud, "I have it."

Mr. Corland stared at the boy steadily as the flush reached upward to his hair, making clear all that the other wished to know. He spoke at last in his coldest and most ominous tone.

"You have fallen into strange company, Nicholas Drury. I had wondered why you suddenly were moved to put on such a bold face in withstanding those who

have more wisdom and more power than you. Well, let youth go to the devil at its own will. It is a way that youth has!"

The meeting came to an end with these far from reassuring words. They bore heavily upon Nicholas' spirits; and yet he somehow felt that he had detected at the last moment a faint flicker in Darius Corland's penetrating gaze, the vaguest hint that he too felt misgiving which he was not quite able to conceal. Of that there was small time to think now, for there remained much to be done. Michael must be taken up and introduced to Mr. Thomas Drury, who accepted him with that listless acquiescence of one who has been long ill and totally dependent upon the arrangements which others must make for him. Dolly, standing by, took in the stranger with such minute examination in a single glance that Nicholas heard her, that evening, giving Phoebe a complete catalogue of every item belonging to his dress and person.

"Eight silver buttons with some kind of a family crest engraved upon them," she recounted, "and a sober waistcoat, not one of those sprigged, satin garments which dandies love to flaunt. And there was a long string of carved seals hanging from his watch pocket, and a big bulge in the pocket itself, as though the watch must be large and solid and golden." It was certainly true that very little escaped Mistress Dolly Drury's quickly observant eye.

After a long session in the little room at the back of the inn, where Michael, Mr. Hollister, and Nicholas went over again the facts and figures set forth in the ledgers and account books, it was time to set their faces to the very greatest task of all. Nicholas had put before his uncle, his uncle's legal adviser, and his new partner, his plan for building a ship in which all of his uncle's work-

men were to have a share. He had even stated the plan before those two who would be most hostile to it and most desirous that it should not succeed. And now came the moment when the great enterprise might still fall to the ground; for he must lay it before the men of Branscomb who were to take part in it with him. He had told Caleb Harmon what it was that he proposed to do; but he had read neither acceptance nor disapproval in the foreman's rugged, noncommittal face.

"Tell the men," Nicholas had directed, "that I will be there in the boat yard in the last hour before the day's work ends, and will talk to them then of my plan and whether it can go forward."

"Very good, sir," Caleb had replied, and had made no other comment.

He had hurried home to the inn, however, during the midday hour, to see how the plans were progressing. Nicholas and Michael were still in session in the small back room, and in some trepidation laid before his able eye the results of their labors. He went over the plans as so far developed, but still did not volunteer any definite opinion.

"We can see how the men will take the idea of a ship built by us all together," he said. "Yet before we go further, we must give the vessel a name. One cannot have any great feeling, somehow, for a ship that is unnamed. Can you think of any that will be suitable?"

"I have thought of a score," admitted Nicholas, "but not one seems to belong exactly to the vessel and the project we have in mind."

Michael confessed to the same difficulty; for he, too, had been calling up and rejecting titles by the dozen, none of which seemed quite good enough for use in such a momentous undertaking.

"I suggest that we consult the—the ladies," he said

at last. "Do you not think that your sister or Mistress Harmon would have better notions than ours?"

Nicholas was not entirely certain that they could be of assistance; but he let Caleb go to summon Phoebe and Dolly for consultation in this difficult matter. The moment the question was laid before them, Dolly had an answer ready. She was standing beside the door, in some haste to be gone upstairs, holding up the corners of her flowered print apron, for she had filled it full of the linen she had just been ironing. She seemed not to be conscious of how steadily Michael's eyes were upon her, as she said with conviction:

"I know well what the ship should be called,—the *Jocasta*. Have we not heard Uncle Thomas say often and often that such was to be the name of the best vessel which his shipyard was ever to produce?"

"That is true, sir," Caleb Harmon backed her up at once. "Many's the time I have heard Mr. Thomas Drury speak of that name. He was always waiting to make sure that he had done his finest piece of work before he christened a vessel after that fair Mistress Drury who was beloved by us all."

Jocasta had been the name of the gay-spirited, beautiful young woman whom Thomas Drury had married in his own eager and vigorous youth. She had died within the year. Stricken and inconsolable he had been, until he filled up his empty household by taking the small son and daughter of his dead brother to live with him. Nicholas also recollected that hope which his uncle had expressed, of building a vessel some day to be worthy of the name which he carried so close to his heart.

Phoebe spoke now in final corroboration. "There is nothing would make good Master Drury happier. You may go on building bigger and finer vessels to the end of your days; but at this dark time, with every man's soul

in doubt, she whom you will launch now will be your most notable ship. You will see what a smile will come when you tell your uncle she is to be called the *Jocasta*."

Thus was it settled; and, strangely, the plan seemed a hundred times more real and possible once the vessel had been given a name.

Caleb Harmon returned to his labor; and those at the inn bent themselves again to theirs. Presently arrived the moment when Nicholas and Michael must go down to the shipyard to consult the men of Branscomb. As the two walked through the wet, rough-cobbled streets, Nicholas was wondering in sudden panic how this last hour of the day could possibly be gone through. The wind had fallen somewhat, and the air was very cold; a sudden return of winter after the brief mildness of yesterday had promised spring. Yet he took little note of anything about him, he was wondering so intently and so miserably what in the world he could say. The idea was strong and lusty within him; but where were the words which would make vivid to others what he felt so vehemently himself? He had never made a speech to any gathering in all of his life. Was there any hope that these stiff-necked, hard-headed toilers of Branscomb would hearken and understand? He had known them all since he had first trotted about in the shipyards, too small to be anything but a trouble, always underfoot in his untiring quest for knowledge of shipbuilding. People are not prone to have any great regard for the opinions of a boy whom they have seen grow up from a baby. Could he possibly make them see the great, overshadowing truths in that scheme which Darius Corland had described as a boy's crack-brained nonsense?

As they came in through the gate, the busy hammers stopped abruptly, the shouting of orders and the creaking of hoisting gear came to an end, and Nicholas, with

his unknown comrade, walked the whole length of the yard in the hush of complete silence. There was far less than the usual work in hand, only two fishing boats drawn up on the cradles for repairs to their hulls, and another at the rigging dock beyond the yards. The great open space in the center, where Thomas Drury's famous vessels had once taken form under a swarm of toiling workmen, was now quite empty.

A pile of timbers stood just where one of those ships should, by rights, have then been building. Nicholas climbed upon it so that he stood above the heads of the workmen who came crowding all about him. It seemed to him, as he looked down upon those upturned faces, that there were strangely many, that not even in its most prosperous days had the Drury yards mustered such a number. There were more than the shipwrights and riggers; there were sailors from all along the waterside, there were the weavers and sail makers, there were all the men of the village, in fact; and there were women too, anxious-faced, white-lipped, their eyes straining up at him to see what help he was to bring. More and more were coming through the gates, crowding as close as they could gather, all looking up, all waiting, intense, quick-breathing, and in absolute quiet, to hear his words.

He opened his lips and found that no words came. Everything that was to be hoped and feared from that plan of his seemed to rush upon him and bewilder him. He could see Michael's intent face upturned just below; he could see Caleb Harmon's beyond, square and unmoving, waiting like the others. What, after all, did he have to give?

A little voice far away at the outskirts of the crowd, the voice of a small man perched astride of the bowsprit of one of the fishing boats, rose high and thin through the stillness.

"Nicholas! Nicholas Drury!" it shouted and the call was suddenly taken up by a hundred deep throats, by the lusty-lunged men, by the higher-pitched voices of the women, in a great roar that came rolling up to him from all that waiting crowd. It echoed back from the sides of the vessels, from the piles of lumber, from the walls of the warehouses, and drifted away on the failing wind all through the town.

Nothing travels faster than news through a shipyard. Half an hour after Caleb Harmon had come amongst them that morning, every man who had worked for Thomas Drury knew what his nephew proposed to do. In an hour the whole of the town was talking of it, women leaving their bread to burn while they ran to a neighbor's to confer over the great news:

"The shipbuilding is to go on. Young Nicholas Drury has found a way."

If Etienne Bardeau had strolled through the market square on that morning instead of the day before, he would have got scant attention, and Darius Corland could have shouted himself hoarse before any one would have turned even to look at the Frenchman with a price upon his head. He would have seen the men and women all gathered about the door of Robert Norton's tailor shop, heard them all talking of the same thing, some wagging their heads in doubt, some with their eyes bright with hope, all of them dropping the same words over and over: "a ship, the *Jocasta*," — "our own venture," — "any sort of cargo," — "the West Indies and the Mediterranean."

Practically every house in Branscomb was empty that afternoon, with all the good folk crowding to the shipyard, standing about amongst the gear and scaffoldings, clambering up to get a better view, all to see young Nicholas and hear what he had to tell them.

And in the end he told them nothing. It was they who

spoke to him and in no words except one long shout after another. Yet they made clear just what was their pathetic hope in him, their anxious, desperate confidence.

"Nicholas! Nicholas Drury."

It is so that people understand one another, who have lived and worked together all their days!

Oh, the heartening knowledge that came to him in that outburst, the feeling that there was belief dwelling in all those humble, loyal hearts! Yesterday he had thought that he stood friendless and alone; and now here were a hundred comrades offering him faith and support in that mere shouting of his name. The boy could never have told them what their tumult of acclaim meant to him; but there was no need, for it was plain for all men to read upon his face.

"The old one stood by us, and now the young one too," cried out John Ewing, the senior shipwright, in a brief pause in the uproar. A woman, with a baby in her arms, who had pressed near, called shrilly:

"Build the *Jocasta* stanch, Master Nicholas, for my man must go to sea in her."

He nodded. Then he leaned forward and beckoned to Michael. His new friend clambered up and stood beside him, while Nicholas found his voice at last.

"He is to be my partner," he said. "Mine and yours also."

Michael Slade doffed his three-cornered hat in greeting. There was no grand manner now, only delighted friendliness. One of the sailors, just below, said audibly to a comrade as Michael uncovered his bright hair:

"There's a beacon to lay a course by!"

The Southerner grinned delightedly as the other seaman answered, "For all his fine coat, he has the cut of a sailor. I'll warrant he's stood his watch aloft, and not climbed up by the lubber's hole, either."

"You are right, my friend," Michael answered. "I am a sailor; and am hoping presently to be a better one. When this ship of yours puts to sea, I hope to sail with her, for any port which will bring us fortune. But the burden of the whole venture will be heavy upon one man. It is Nicholas Drury who will carry the weight of risk and responsibility. We must all stand by him; we must give him aid to the utmost that our hearts can offer."

Once more the same great shout went thundering through the yards, a mighty roar of a hundred echoes. The sound swept up the narrow, empty streets and was heard by little Mr. Hollister sitting in his study, causing him to smile quietly to himself in unspoken satisfaction. The last spent force of it even reached the Blackbird Inn, made Dolly Drury clap her hands together, brought Phoebe to drop the dasher of the churn, caused Thomas Drury, lying with closed eyes upon his pillow, to smile as though at music heard through a dream.

Joseph Ryall, at the table in the front chamber beside Mr. Corland, put down the paper he was reading and lifted his head to hearken.

"They are greeting the new plan with strange clamor," he observed.

But Darius Corland never lifted his eyes from the page over which his quill pen was moving steadily. If he heard the shouting voices, he made no sign.



CHAPTER V

WHITE OAK AND MEADOW LARKS

At the end of March, when the winds had begun to blow warm instead of cold, when the trilling of black-birds was beginning to be heard in the marsh, and meadow larks, with their sweet, high voices, were singing on the fence rails, a line of timber wains came lumbering down the road which led out of the north country. The team of four great draft horses which drew each one was weary and mud-splattered; their broad feet plodded laboriously over the last of the heavy miles. Beneath the wagon beams were slung those oak timbers of which Ephraim Haverall had sent word so many weeks before. Ships could be built of cedar or fir; but for the *Jocasta* there was to be used only the best of good white oak. There were, moreover, loads of smaller tree stems and the great curving branches which were to be cut into knees, thwarts and rising timber. The little procession filed into the shipyard and drew up alongside the space where the slanted way and the keel blocks had already been prepared. The great enterprise was fairly begun.

"I have often thought," Caleb Harmon said to Nicholas, as he laid out the shape of a crooked knee upon the accommodating angle of a tremendous oak bough, so that the grain of the wood could run from one end to another, "I have often thought that the oaks must know that they are to be ships some day, and grow their branches to the proper shape."

"I believe, instead, that the men who first built ships took the bent oak branches and made the lines of stem and ribs and knees to fit them," Nicholas replied. "Perhaps the curve which stands without breaking against gales of wind is the true one to withstand the stormy onslaught of heavy seas."

The keel was laid; the curves of stem and stern post began to show; the ribs were set in proper line; and the form of the ship began to come into being. From the man whose simple task it was to cut the straight treenails of tough locust wood, to the ship's carpenter of long-studied and uncanny skill, who fitted the planks over the rounding curve of the stern and the flare of the bows, there was not one who was not working with his whole heart in the task.

"They toiled well for your uncle, but there is a new ring to the hammers now that they are working, in part, for themselves," Caleb Harmon observed to Nicholas, standing beside the table in the outer room of the countinghouse.

Nicholas nodded without speaking; for he was busy over one of the full-sized drawings of which so many were needed in the building of the ship. Michael could occasionally help him a little with this portion of the work; but his assistance could not go very far. Very nearly the whole of the drawings must be done by Nicholas, who toiled over them for countless hours, so anxious was he that nothing should delay in the steady progress forward.

Michael had proved himself invaluable in a score of

ways. Immediately after that first afternoon in the shipyards he had absented himself during the three days necessary for making a journey to and from Boston. On his return he had put into Nicholas' hands a small leather bag which contained the hundred golden guineas which were to constitute his share of the capital. Small as was the amount in proportion to the cost of building the ship, any sum in gold was extraordinarily welcome.

"There is fair magic in those gold coins," Caleb Harmon said, when a doubting merchant had hesitated long and sourly over promising the copper for the *Jocasta's* sheathing, and had suddenly turned into smiling acquiescence when an advance was paid him in jingling gold. With the country full of worthless paper currency, that which in the unstable times was called "hard money" could work wonders. It was astonishing what Michael's guineas accomplished and how far he and Nicholas, between them, managed to make them go. Just where he had obtained them, was, for a time, not clearly revealed.

He himself was a thousand times more valuable than any money could be. He was clear-headed and quick-thinking, and was always ready to take upon himself any one of the endless tasks, big or little, which go with the proper management of any enterprise. He would work over pages of figures for endless hours; he would write countless letters, and make expeditions either into the town or farther afield to gather the material that some unsuspected need would demand.

A few of the men looked a little askance at the stranger from the South until one day when, as he passed through the yards, he found six men, desperate and intense, struggling with a task completely beyond them. A big timber had slid from its proper position and as it settled slowly, was threatening to crush old John Ewing who was pinned below it. The men had lifted and pushed,

had strained and heaved, but with no success beyond checking a little the slow slipping of the beam. Michael, throwing off his coat, had added his sturdy shoulder to their spent efforts, and they had seen the heavy oak timber suddenly rise and move into its place while John Ewing scrambled out quite unperturbed, and fell to work again as though nothing out of the way had happened.

"He's got the strength of three, but where does he carry it?" old Ewing marveled aloud, regarding with grateful wonder Michael's slim, supple figure as he walked away.

"I thought such as he always had blacks to do their toiling and carrying for them," observed another of the astounded six. "To think he could outlift us that's been at the task all our lives. There is more in the lad than we had believed."

Michael's great gift was in dealing with his fellow men. In spite of his slave-holding parentage, he had chanced to have born within him the spirit of true comradeship with all of his own kind. Caleb Harmon, whom even Nicholas had found to be tough-willed and difficult to move, was his completely devoted adherent. There were certain matters in which Nicholas and the foreman did not think alike; for the boy was determined to draw away from the heavy, solid tradition which had modeled the ships of New England from earlier times. Caleb was stubbornly conservative in the matter of slimmer bows or lighter bracing, and he often uttered grumbling prophecies of, "You will rob her of all her strength and will make her sail no better."

Nicholas knew well that it is almost impossible to foretell how a ship will handle when at last she puts to sea; she may be either crabbed or sea kindly; she may do her best in light airs or in a heavy wind. Whether she is to bring her designer pride or disappointment, only the final test can tell. All that her creator can do is to

put into her everything that he has of heart and hand and brain, and leave the issue to the incalculable proof by wind and weather. And this Nicholas was doing, ably seconded by Caleb and Michael and by all the heartily toiling men who loved to think that she was partly their own.

Beyond the long countingroom was a smaller apartment where Nicholas' drawing table was set, and where he carried out his most intense hours of work. It had been Thomas Drury's special office, a modest, business-like space, set at the very end of the long building, so that it actually rested upon the wharf. The walls were lined with shelves, cupboards and lockers, with hull models of past Drury ships standing wherever there was room. The single door, opening into the larger countinghouse, was of heavy oak, so that when it was closed there was complete quiet in the little place, save for that distant muffled sound of hammers which could always be heard everywhere through the whole town, and for the lapping of the tide, rising and falling among the barnacled piles beneath the row of small windows.

Often when Nicholas toiled late by flaring candlelight, and would at last put up his work and come out into the larger room to take his way homeward, he would find Michael all alone in the great shadowy countinghouse, working at his own desk with his single candle a spot of brightness in the great cave of dark. And sometimes when he had come so early in the morning that the sky still showed the red of sunrise through the windows, he would find, after he had been working an hour and had chanced to go forth to fetch something from the outer countingroom, that Michael, in silent industry, had long been working there also. It was his policy never to disturb Nicholas when he knew that his comrade behind the closed door was busy with intricate design and more intricate calculation.

There were times when Nicholas heard him remonstrating with some clerk or workman who would have knocked, or who had brought some errand which must be laid before Master Nicholas Drury himself. After a certain hour of the day, Nicholas would turn his energies to all these matters of business which were constantly being referred to him; but over his tense toil at night or early morning Michael was wont to watch with jealous zeal.

Phoebe and Dolly, Nicholas knew, commented and protested to each other over his long hours and his growing evidence of weariness.

"The boy begins to have a look of his uncle," Caleb Harmon had said more than once. But Phoebe had told them all:

"You say that if the enterprise is to be made a success, some one must toil, even as Nicholas is doing. The worst will soon be passed and until then there is no use in plaguing him with advice and remonstrance. We can only take such good care of him as we know how to do."

Mr. Darius Corland had long since taken his departure from the Blackbird Inn and was heard to be very busy up and down the countryside, taking care of his new acres purchased from Thomas Drury. People complained that he was a harsh landlord, after the easy, kindly administration of the man whose tenants they once had been.

"He asks in the village daily how the work is going forward," Mr. Hugh Hollister told Nicholas. "He says no word here for good or ill, but I know that among his great acquaintances in the near-by towns, among merchants and men who used to trade overseas, he speaks of your enterprise with scoffing, and declares that it is bound to come to disaster."

"Men such as he do not wish to see the country prosper," Nicholas answered. Even in spite of what he heard, both from Mr. Hollister and others, he could not bring

himself to believe that he had sufficient reason to betray Darius Corland's Tory principles. "I cannot see that he can do us any serious harm," he told both himself and Mr. Hollister more than once. "There are many others besides Mr. Corland who think little of our scheme, and say so."

He could never quite put from his mind the recollection of that look which Darius Corland had given him when the man's guilty mind seemed to be tracing the connection from Etienne Bardeau to Nicholas Drury. Yet such was the press of his hard work that he could not give that uneasy memory any very great attention. He was even puzzled for some little time when his sister Dolly reported a very curious occurrence.

"Mr. Joseph Ryall lodged with us last night," she said to Nicholas one day, when he had just returned from a brief journey to a town fifty miles distant. "He did not ask if you were here, although one or two of the things which he chanced to say made me think that he knew you were away. He had put on a manner of rather too affable and odious politeness when I brought him his supper, so that I was in no haste to come back and clear it away. But it seemed to me that I heard his footsteps stirring overhead, and when I went up, there he was in the upper passage, just outside the door of your room. He seemed confused and said something about coming to see how my uncle did, before he hurried past me down the stairs."

When Nicholas mounted to his little chamber under the eaves, he found it in the same trim order in which it was always kept; but there were, nevertheless, certain small things set away carefully in unaccustomed places which made him believe that perhaps some unwonted hand had been fingering his possessions. He spoke of the matter to Michael, who nodded wisely.

"Darius Corland's mind appears to dwell unhappily

upon that letter. I think that he does not sleep quite easy of nights for wondering just where it is. It looks as though he had requested Joseph Ryall to find out for him."

Michael did not lodge at the Blackbird Inn; for beyond the room or two which Phoebe was obliged to keep for passing travelers, there was no further accommodation. He lived, instead, with Mr. Hugh Hollister; and many were the tales which he told of that good man's trials with the high-handed, narrow-hearted Henrietta Sparrow. Even she had not been quite proof against Michael's engaging smile; but she showered upon him no luxuries of living in the house over which she held such iron sway.

"She makes me as uncomfortable as she dares," said Michael, "but she is a woman, after all, and has some stirrings of mercy hidden behind that uncompromising exterior."

There was one afternoon when Nicholas and Michael were finishing their work in the countingroom that the just-departing clerk said at the door, "Here are two men asking to see you, Mr. Drury."

The two came in, an odd pair, one tall and shambling, with a long, thin neck and inquisitive, crafty eyes, the other somewhat shorter and with a shifty expression no more pleasing than that of the first. They stood glancing uneasily about them, while the tall one finally stated their errand.

"We wish to take employment with you."

"Are you carpenters?" inquired Nicholas. He did not like the look of the two and was searching his mind as to where he had seen one or the other of those ungainly figures before.

"We are riggers," the taller man answered readily, seeming to be the acknowledged spokesman of the two. "And I can turn a hand at blacksmithing also; I can

forge you bolts and beat out copper sheeting; in fact, I am a handy Jack at a dozen sorts of work."

"But you are not Branscomb men," Nicholas answered. "We are, at present, using only such workmen as have been with us for a great length of time. We have no need of others."

"So be it," agreed the tall man, without protest. "It is true that we have worked at various trades and have followed the sea also, until we are not from any place in particular, as such poor seafaring men may come to be. But we never had it held against us before. Moreover, we bore arms for our country in the late war."

"And where was it you saw fighting?" Nicholas inquired. The other hesitated a moment, as though in calculation, and answered, though not very convincingly:

"We were by at the surrender of Yorktown, in—in the Carolina troops."

Michael offered a question. "Was your commander a certain Colonel Powell, a great, tall man with a tremendous, roaring voice?"

"Ay, that was he," replied the man quickly. "I knew him well. He commended me, and recommended my promotion from the ranks for special bravery."

Michael answered him with such a burst of laughter that the would-be veteran's sallow countenance changed abruptly and he wheeled about and strode out of the room, saying as he did so:

"Come, comrade, there is no kindness here for unfortunate men in search of honest labor."

They went out, closing the door smartly upon the still unchecked mirth of Michael Slade.

"I wish you could have seen what manner of man Colonel Powell really was," he said to Nicholas, after the disconcerted pair had disappeared. "A round, short fellow, with a chubby, red face, and a voice that had

forgotten to change, so that it was high and squeaking and broke when he gave orders in excitement. He had the heart of a tiger, but the outward look of a cherub. The man only said that he was at Yorktown because it was the farthest point he could think of from New England."

Nicholas was looking more serious. "I think they were the same two," he said, "who manned the sloop that night we put Etienne Bardeau on board his ship. Of the tall one I feel the most certain; for I saw a lank figure very like to his outlined against the sail. Did you note how the eyes of both of them were busy every instant that they were in the room, looking at each door and window, each desk and cupboard? I do not yet see what they thought they could gain by coming here; surely no one could believe that we would give work to such an evident pair of rogues. Well, at least they took themselves away without too much argument."

Michael also could make nothing of the fruitless effort of the two to find employment in the shipyard. He was not certain that they were the same two whom they had caught sight of on the sloop, and he was inclined to think them merely an exceptionally stupid and clumsy couple of vagabonds and dismissed the question for talk of more important things.

A few days later, however, sudden and disagreeable light was shed upon the matter. Nicholas and Michael happening to come, the first ones in the morning, to the door of the countinghouse, stopped in amazement upon the threshold.

"It looks as though the furies had been at work!" Michael exclaimed, after a long whistle of surprise and dismay. The place was in the most frantic confusion: books, papers, maps, drawings had been flung hither and thither in some headlong and hasty search. Every desk had been ransacked; every cupboard had been turned out.

The inner room had been broken into also, and here the disorder was even worse. Chairs had been overturned; the big drawing table had been upset as it was thrust back against the wall; the half-dozen drawers of papers and records had been turned upside down bodily, and their contents flung upon the floor. The window at the end of the smaller room, by which the invaders had entered, was still standing open, swinging upon its hinges, showing a broken lock.

"They must have come in a boat, at high tide," said Nicholas, leaning far over the window sill to look down at the tall, slippery piling below. There was a narrow ledge at the top of the piles where an active man—provided he was sufficiently tall—could have stepped from a boat and reached the window frame.

The watchmen whose duty it was to patrol the yards at night would have been certain to discover any person who attempted to enter the building from any one of the three other sides. But it was quite true that a boat might have slipped in under cover of the darkness at the height of the tide and, rising to some tall, combing wave, could have reached high enough for a man to spring to the narrow footing and grasp the window sill. Once there, he could have pulled up a shorter comrade to join him.

"They are a somewhat more clever pair than we counted them as being," observed Michael, as they began to attempt to bring order out of the wanton confusion which the invaders had left behind. "As far as I can see, they have taken nothing away with them. The thing that they were looking for, they have failed to find."

It was true that there had been no robbery of any sort. There was only paper currency locked up in the money drawer of the big desk; what little they possessed of real coin had been carried away to a place of safer deposit. Nicholas had thought a little of placing the letter where

the gold and silver was stored; but he hesitated to let it go out of his own hands, fearful of its being seen and investigated by no matter how trustworthy a clerk. He had carried it in the inner pocket of his coat, at first simply because he had not thought to put it elsewhere, and later because he began to doubt the safety of any lock or hiding place. Michael had offered to take possession of the disagreeable missive which must be so carefully guarded, but Nicholas had declined.

"It was given to me, so it is I who must keep it, though the thing is as troublesome as a keg of gunpowder. I wish Darius had never let it slip through his fingers in the first place."

"It ought to be possible to find out those two marauders and cast them into the town jail," Michael declared, when they had finally set the room once more to rights. "Such a conspicuous pair once seen by any one could not fail to be recognized again. No person could forget those two ugly forms and faces. Etienne Bardeau spoke the truth when he said that Darius Corland did not choose his subordinate rascals well." He stood a moment thinking, yet in a moment he burst out, "Oh, Nicholas, Nicholas, I did not do well when you and I conferred that day with Darius and his chase-dog, Joseph Ryall. It was I who let drop word of the French ship and so gave proof that our doings were somehow bound up with Etienne's. Can I never learn to hold my tongue, strutting coxcomb that I am?"

Nicholas sought to reassure him. "A man so determined as Mr. Corland would presently have discovered, somehow, where the letter had gone," he insisted. "Many times I am tempted to give the paper back to him, or to burn it."

To this Michael offered determined remonstrance. "As Etienne said, it is a talisman to be used in time of

need. We are wiser to keep it; we can never tell what the future holds for us."

No inquiry in the village, no searching by even more able persons than pottering Joshua Barstow, managed to reveal any traces of those two who had broken into the countinghouse. Conspicuous though they were in appearance, they appeared to have enough cleverness between them to escape without leaving any clue behind. They were gone, and there was no way of discovering whither "save by asking Darius," a suggestion of Michael's which neither of the friends cared to carry into effect.

Nicholas, however, weary of the continual consciousness of that much discussed letter in his pocket, had at last managed to rid himself of it. He had mounted, one evening, to the loft of the shed for no more adventurous purpose than to throw down hay to Dobbin and, in the dark where no man could see him, he had, by sudden impulse, drawn out the paper and thrust it under one of the beams of the roof, where it lay pressed close between the timber and the shingles. Then he went his way, saying no word, even to Michael, of what he had done. As the weeks passed, dust gradually gathered thick over the lurking place of the letter; a busy spider spun its curtain to cover the spot still more completely. It was as thoroughly lost, as completely safe, as though locked away in the stoutest strong box in the colony of Massachusetts. Even Nicholas finally began to forget its unwelcome existence. On Michael's urging he had, some time before, taken the precaution of storing one of Thomas Drury's long-barreled pistols in the locker in the countinghouse where he kept his drawings, in case of surprise by some unwelcome visitor. But as time went by without any hint of further disturbance, he finally pushed the unwieldy thing under a heap of papers and laughed at himself for keeping it there.

On such of the long summer evenings as he was not

working to late hours in the countinghouse, he, Dolly and Michael used to sit in the little room at the back of the inn, looking out upon the garden where the grass was so thick and green, and where the orange-red fruit of the plum trees was slowly deepening to ripe crimson. Or they would walk, all three of them, down to the Marsh Road, where they would stand listening to the slow sliding of the long swells up the beach, while some awakened water bird, roused from its sleep in long marsh grasses, would go winging its way above their heads. They would come back again, up through the garden and see the candle at Mr. Thomas Drury's window shining through the crooked branches and slender leaves of the plum trees. Since Darius Corland had taken formal possession of the big house with its orchards and gardens, this place was home now, home where they were well cared for and not unhappy, where Thomas Drury was slowly, very slowly, coming back to strength once more.

The two had been friends—Nicholas and his sister—with Michael, from the very day of their first meeting; they were growing now to know each other in that intimacy of an intent and common purpose which knits friendship to its very closest. It was Dolly who felt free to ask quite easily one evening:

“Michael, why do we not see any more that beautiful dangle of chain and seals which hung from your watch pocket the first day we laid eyes upon you?”

The red-haired boy explained without a shadow of embarrassment:

“The seals, and the watch with them, are far on their voyage to England or Gibraltar, in the portly pocket of a British naval officer, and, in exchange, his good gold guineas are helping to raise up the *Jocasta* for the glory of America.”

“Oh,” she cried, “how could you part with it?”

"It was not so difficult. Certainly when that ferret-eyed Joseph Ryall challenged me to say what I had brought to this enterprise, I could think of nothing else. The British captain saw me take the watch out of my pocket, asked to see it and actually appeared to fall in love with it as he held it in his hand. When he asked me whether I would part with it for a hundred guineas, I was furious with his impertinence. I informed him that I did not chance to be a goldsmith or a peddler of jewelry, told him that the watch was my father's, and nothing would tempt me to give it up. I fumed over what I termed his vulgar impudence for a whole day, while Etienne laughed at me. It is strange how one's ideas change. I wished so much to aid in the building of the *Jocasta* that I traveled hotfoot back to Boston, in a fearful turmoil lest the man's ship had sailed. I did not even mind taking back all my words and pocketing the Englishman's money. And I will say for him that he was sufficiently a gentleman not to mock at me."

Little by little, Michael told the other two much of living on the big plantation as far removed from their life as though it were in some other world. He spoke of the big white house under the eucalyptus trees, of the rows of tiny cottages which were the slave quarters, of the Negroes picking cotton in the hot sun, or sitting at the doors of their cabins in the evenings, singing all together in the warm darkness. He told of the raccoon hunts by torchlight, with the crowd of sportsmen walking through the woods while the dogs coursed hither and yonder seeking the quarry; of the far-off baying of some wise old hound's "tree-bark," as the Negroes called it, when it had found the victim and had driven it to take refuge among the branches. Then some agile black youth would go shinning up the trunk, to shake down the snarling 'coon, where it would roll and tumble and bite among

the dogs and often put up so excellent a fight that it would get clean away.

He described to them also another race than the Negroes, the Seminole Indians, who still clung to their homes in the swampy forests to the south. Indians had almost vanished from the New England seaboard, so that Dolly and Nicholas had seldom seen any and knew nothing of their ways of living. Michael had camped and hunted with them from the time he was a small boy. For one old chief he had formed a great friendship, and had learned much from him both as to the best manner of shooting deer and wild turkeys and as to the traditions and beliefs which his people usually guarded jealously from the whites.

Dolly loved particularly to hear of the great company which gathered in the big parlor, of the ladies in their powder and brocaded petticoats, the gentlemen quite as fine with their jeweled buttons, satin coats and lace ruffles. There was much fiery oratory to be heard within those high white walls, where the tremendous questions of the times leading up to the Revolution were argued and reargued. Most especially did Nicholas enjoy accounts of that friend of Michael's father, whom the men of that neighborhood called "Long Tom Jefferson." He would sit by the fire in the big armchair, with his lengthy legs crossed, and tell all the others truths which they refused to believe. "You can make men free, yes," most of his hearers would maintain, "but you can never make them equal. There will always be some higher and some lower."

To which Mr. Jefferson would shake his head and reply, "I know better than that and you will also, in time." Once he had looked around, and had seen the youngest son of the house staring and listening with all his soul and had said, "Here is one who believes

me; is it not so, Michael?" And the boy had agreed seriously:

"It is so indeed."

It was not until he had known the two many months that he came to relate to them, stumbingly, as though he had never put the story into words before, the tale of his father's death. Nicholas had been commenting on the easy skill with which he had, that afternoon, bound up the hammer-bruised finger of one of the shipwrights.

"You could not have done it better yourself, Dolly," Nicholas declared, for Dolly's fingers were well known for their handling of bandages. Michael protested.

"No man ever does such things as well as a woman. As I have told you, what little I can do is because my mother taught me."

And then, haltingly, but with determination as though it were a relief to speak of the thing nearest his heart, he told them of the one occasion when his mother's courage and spirit had failed her. His father, the lord of broad acres, had had some slight difference in a Charleston tavern, a dispute over politics, with the owner of the neighboring estate. Mr. Chevers had come to the house to renew the argument and the talk had lasted long into the summer night, with their anger, instead of spending itself in talk, growing hotter and more intense as the hours passed. They had fought a duel at sunrise on the long terrace above the rose garden, and Michael, then a boy of thirteen, had been roused from his bed by a terror-stricken Negro servant to, "Come tend to de Mas'r." He had run down to see his mother lying like a dead woman on the parlor floor, where, in the big room, shadowy in the morning twilight, she had tried to dress the mortal wound of the master of the house.

Michael had labored to extract the bullet and check the flow of blood, but his boy's skill was to no purpose.

“It was evening before my brother could fetch the doctor from the nearest town, although he rode the blue roan, the best horse in three counties. Doctor Shannon said that I had done all that any man could do. He himself could accomplish scarcely anything more, and my father died before morning. Mr. Chevers, our neighbor, had walked the floor in the big parlor all night. I could hear his feet going up and down, up and down, as I watched beside the bed. I went down to—to tell him what had happened, at last. I can never forget the gray look on his face as he cried out, ‘God knows I never meant that it should end like this.’ He went stumbling away through the long window that opened on the terrace and walked out through the garden, and we never saw him again.”

Nicholas and Dolly had listened aghast. Dueling was so much less common in New England than in the more southern colonies that they had never heard just such a tale before. They were both so stricken with their friend’s grief that neither could speak, and it was Michael finally who had to lead the talk to more cheerful things. It was from that hour that they all knew that the friendship had gone so deep that nothing could ever come between them.

In these days the ship’s carpenters worked up to the very edge of the late darkness to push the work forward. It is a long task to build a ship; a far more intricate one even than the building of a dwelling. A house is an erection of straight walls and square corners, of simple elements and long-established methods. But a ship is a bewildering matter of curves and slants, with never a right angle in the whole of her. The oak planks must be as stout as nature can make them; but they must bend and taper and fit one into the next with never a space between. If wind creeps through a crevice in the wall of a dwelling there is discomfort and shivering within; but

if water, always seeking and always jealous to destroy those who set sail upon it, finds a place for entry, there is not discomfort but disaster. That the Branscomb venture should go forward with speed was of great importance; that it should be a safe and successful one was more important still.

The clinking music of calking tools now went echoing up and down the shipyards while the pungent smell of tarred oakum filled the air. The twisted skeins of the spun oakum seemed to disappear like magic into the sides of the great hull which now stood towering upon the ways.

A few months before in that open space there had been nothing, and now, by some miracle of imagination coupled with industry, here was this majestic vessel, beautiful in her grace and waiting power. Presently she would sail away into that great, blue, dreaming expanse of water which lay waiting for her. Every long wave that came slipping and creeping up to break among the piles or along the shingle seemed to carry the message, "How soon are you coming?" Upon every puff of warm wind carrying the scent of hemp, tar and fragrant, new lumber, bearing the ringing sound of hammers and eager voices, there seemed to ride the answer:

"Before long, before long."

Nicholas, looking up at her as she stood sometimes against the clear, transparent light of early morning, sometimes against the soft dark and a myriad of stars, used to wonder strangely how she could have come there. From the strain of responsibility and toil he was now unbelievably weary, so that both body and brain required urging, and neither served him as once they had done. Although all was going forward with the greatest of smoothness, and all hearts were full of hope, he, for very exhaustion from the long labor, was beginning to doubt. Had he done well to lead all these trusting folk into this

great undertaking? Could anybody, in these uncertain times have unshakable belief in himself and in what was before them all? Was he conducting these good comrades of his toward even greater disaster than had faced them in the beginning? He could only make up his mind that he had laid out a course for them all and that at one time he had thought, with the whole strength of his spirit, that it was the right one. To that course he would cling, no matter what head winds of doubt and weariness and disappointment sought to beat him back or drive him from the way. That was the utmost that he could do.

He was thinking of all these things as he stood, on a night which was verging into morning, before his draughting table in the small room of the countinghouse. He had given the finishing touches to the set of drawings which would complete the deck works of the *Jocasta*, and would be the last needed to complete her hull and make it ready for the launching. He could scarcely believe, as he put down his pen, that this laborious portion of the great task was finally at an end. He heard the watchman on his rounds tramp the length of the big room outside, shut the outer door and go trudging away. It was after midnight; long since time for him to go home to the Blackbird Inn and to bed. How heavily weary he suddenly found himself to be.

With slow clumsy fingers he rolled up the drawings, carried them to the cupboard in the wall, locked the door and dropped the key into his pocket. He sat down upon the high stool to set himself to the task of clearing the table of its odds and ends left over from the work,—ink, spoiled pens, scraps of paper with calculations upon them. He must try to hurry, he thought dimly. Dolly and Phoebe would both chide him in the morning when they knew, and they always did know, how late he had toiled in that room above the wharf. Yet he was so

spent that he could make no haste. He had used his entire energy for finishing the work and had left none with which to set the last matters in order and to carry himself home. He had forgotten that even that little more effort would be needed.

He told himself more than once that he need not really make such attempts to hurry, although he knew all the time that he must be gone. It would do no harm, however, to lay his arm along the table and drop his head upon it for a single moment of rest. He did so, and in an instant was asleep.

The window above the water stood open in the warm night air. The tide was coming in, the long ripples washing higher and higher against the piling. There was little other sound save for the sudden excited call of a killdeer winging its squawking way overhead. It was true that, after its harsh cry had dropped into silence, there was still a faint noise, something like the creaking of oars, very carefully dipping oars, but still not quite silent in their rowlocks. Nicholas heard neither water, bird nor boat, but slept the heavy slumber of complete exhaustion. The candle guttered, burnt low and went out, leaving the room dark. The tide came steadily up and up below the window.

He started awake, not knowing what had broken his slumber, but aroused into immediate and complete alertness. A hand, a soft, stealing hand, had sought to thrust itself inside his coat. The boy, instantly on his feet, faced a tall man who had come noiselessly across the floor to lean over him and who now started back and took up one of a pair of pistols which he had laid upon the table.

It was plain to Nicholas that he had been asleep for a long time. The room was no more in darkness; for daylight was almost come, with a strip of red showing along

the horizon beyond the open window. It gave striking background for the head and broad shoulders of a second man, thrust through the narrow frame with his elbows on the sill. It made plain, by faint radiance drifting past into the room, that the other intruder, he whose hand had that moment been in Nicholas' pocket, was stepping warily to the opposite side of the table, where he sat down, laying the two heavy pistols upon the board before him and keeping one of his long hands resting upon the butt of each.

"You may sit down also," he directed impudently, "for we have one or two things to say to you." He had dropped completely that uncouth manner of a laborer seeking hire which he had assumed at their former meeting. "We have waited very patiently, my comrade and I, for the tide to lift us within reach of your window, and now we have not many minutes to waste. We would like to have—at once—that which we believe you carry in your inner pocket. My comrade is of a tender nature and did not enjoy the thought of putting a bullet through your head as you slept, otherwise I would have had the paper in my hands already."

"How do you come to think that it is in my inner pocket?" asked Nicholas, fencing for delay, although he knew of little good which it might do him.

"Because I have felt in all the outer ones, while you were wrapped in sweet and dreamless slumber," replied the man coldly. "And we have, at other occasions, taken the liberty of searching all your possessions and have not found it. We know, at last, just where the letter lies."

"You have no proof of my having such a letter at all," Nicholas maintained. The other laughed shortly.

"Do you see my comrade in the window? We will call him Hezekiah Truman, that not being his name. He is a good fellow; his only fault is that he scarcely knows

his own mind. When he is safe and moderately prosperous, he has many noble ideas concerning truth and honor and similar nonsense; when he feels the pinch of want they crumble into nothing. It was to him that the letter was given by—by the man who wrote it, to be carried to England. In some fantastic freak of imagined gratitude he gave it to Etienne Bardeau. The Frenchman had saved him from being flogged by a company of rough fellows whom Hezekiah had happened to displease. The tale is too long, to tell you now. Then the boasting fool must needs pluck up heart and tell the writer of the letter what he had done with it, and that he would serve him as a go-between no longer. Do you follow what I am saying?"

"Yes," said Nicholas, "Go on."

"I need not warn you that one call for the watchman will usher you promptly into the next world," went on the tall man, grasping one of the pistol butts a little more firmly. "Not even our squeamish Hezekiah would hesitate for that, I am certain. You will notice that my companion has a pistol also, and I assure you that he is a good enough marksman at such short range. You will observe, moreover, that, while you slept, I took the precaution to shoot that bolt which holds the door. You were wise to have so heavy a one; it should hold against a regiment. Now we will go forward with our little talk.

"I do not know quite why I make all this so plain to you, save to let you understand that the man who sent me hither is not to be outwitted. As I was saying, our good Hezekiah boasted of his purity of principles to his master but—he was made to suffer for his treachery and speedily brought to a different frame of mind. He was sent posthaste to find this Etienne Bardeau, and I will say for Hezekiah that here at last he showed some little wit. Without letting the Frenchman know that he had real interest in the letter, he got from him the certain

knowledge that it had been given to you. That brings us," he concluded pleasantly, "to the end of the story, the last paragraph in which our young hero gives the writer of the letter his own again."

"We have not reached that yet," declared Nicholas steadily, "and we will not reach it. You may tell Darius Corland—"

The man jumped to his feet, snatching up his weapon. "Speak that name again," he cried, "and it is the last word you will ever utter. I will tell you this much of that person, however, that he bade us stop at nothing to regain his property. Now, will you give up the letter or do we take it from you?"

They faced each other for a moment of silence, and in that stillness they heard the far, outer door open, as two men came in.

"Nicholas must have come before us," said Michael Slade, "or the smaller door would be ajar. The watchman always leaves it so."

"I suppose we must not disturb him," answered the gruff voice of Caleb Harmon, who seemed to have stopped beside the outer door. "There is no use in waiting; I can return later. Do you come with me, Master Slade, for I want you to see that biggest timber with which I am not satisfied. Since Master Nicholas is too busy to look at it, you must."

"A moment," answered Michael; "I must put these records into my desk." His feet came down the long room and drew close, while those within heard the creak of the desk lid and the rustling of paper.

At the first sound of his voice, the tall man had leaned across the table and rested the cool metal of the pistol muzzle against Nicholas' temple. His eyes and an ugly, mirthless grin which overspread his face told what he dared not say lest he be overheard. All three were mo-

tionless, almost without breathing as the desk lid outside snapped down and Michael moved away. Involuntarily Nicholas stirred in his chair and the tall man leaned closer.

"Do you so much as take a long breath, as though for crying out, and you are done," he said, though scarcely audible even a foot from Nicholas' ear. The smaller man stretched his head as far into the room as he could and spoke in an anxious hissing whisper.

"Never fire that weapon here within the room," he warned his comrade. "It will bring the whole hornets' nest about our ears. As soon as the door closes, we can swing him, together, out through the window and, while he is struggling in the water, Jennings can smite him over the head with an oar. Once stunned and in the boat, we can have our will of him. But it will be the end of us if you fire."

"Hold your peace," ordered the other. He chanced a louder whisper, for Michael was at the farther door.

Nicholas had sat without moving except for his eyes, which went from one to another. Even with the inexperience of his years he was something of a judge of men. He could see that Hezekiah was an irresolute coward, but that the man beside him was possessed of brains and determination, as well as villainy. It would mean little to him to blow his victim into another world if it would serve his purpose. Yet at this moment, crafty as the rascal was, he was committing the mistake of listening too intently to the departing footsteps outside. He had turned his head ever so little to hear the sound of the far door swinging open.

With a lightning-quick upward movement of his arm, Nicholas struck up the muzzle of the pistol at his head and grasped the lean wrist which held the other.

"Michael," he shouted with all the strength of his lungs, as he sprang to his feet, "Michael."



CHAPTER VI

THE GREAT ENTERPRISE

The great pistol went off with a tremendous crash which sounded like the report of a cannon in that narrow place. The tall man flung it aside and bent all his strength to twisting free the wrist which Nicholas held clenched in both his hands. The boy could hear shouts and running footsteps outside; then he heard Michael fling himself against the door. He and the tall man stamped and wrestled and fought all up and down the room, upsetting the table, and smashing the drawing stool under their trampling feet. The sinewy stranger was quite evidently the stronger of the two, less agile than his younger companion, but not one whit less determined.

Suddenly he dropped the pistol. Taken unawares, Nicholas allowed it to fall clattering to the floor as he drew back; but not quite quickly enough. The other's long fingers had caught him by the throat in a strangling grasp which no struggling could unloose. Over his shoulder Nicholas could see the heavy bolt which held the door bending and straining under the terrific blows which his comrade outside was raining upon the wood.

With both his hands he clutched and jerked at the wrists of his assailant, but he could do nothing to break that vicelike grip. He was sick, dizzy, beginning to grow limp in the other's inflexible grasp. Then, suddenly, he saw the bolt rip clean away from the oak doorpost, and saw Michael, like a red-haired thunderbolt, come hurtling into the room.

The tall stranger stepped back to face the newcomer; but his lean strength was no match for that tremendous power which dwelt in Michael Slade. The boy picked him up as though he were some great, grotesque puppet, swung him back and forth to gather an instant of momentum, then flung him straight and clean out through the window.

His comrade Hezekiah, at the report of the pistol, had vanished from his place like a fleeting vision for which the magic had been broken by the crack of the shot within. Michael wasted no glance upon the fate of his victim, but turned quickly to his friend.

"Has he slain you?" he cried desperately, but Nicholas, sitting down giddily upon the edge of the overturned table, shook his head. He could not yet speak, yet he contrived a reassuring smile to show that he was still safe. Caleb Harmon, with a half-dozen others behind him, came crowding into the room and stood staring in amazement at the scene of upheaval all about them. Only then did Michael go to the window to see what had become of his late antagonist.

"They are getting him into the boat," he announced, "two other men, and are rowing him away. Caleb, have the watch called out and tell Joshua Barstow to see that such a boat does not come to shore on any of the wharves. Let him send two or three armed men with horses, to ride along the shore road and prevent these rascals from coming to land in any of our coves. I do not care much

whither they go; but we will take pains that it shall be far from here and that they have a long pull before they find harbor."

News came back presently that they had taken refuge upon a small sloop lying off Branscomb Head, had got up sail and stood away northward. "I trust that they have had enough at last," observed Michael grimly, "but they can have more of the treatment at any time that they care to come back."

Nicholas was hoarse for a space of days after the encounter, but otherwise had suffered no real hurt. After several days of watching his friend with most unhappy anxiety, Michael finally was somewhat eased and declared himself satisfied that no serious harm had been done.

"You look yourself again at last," he told Nicholas cheerily, at the end of a week, "although I would that all this toil had not made you grow so thin. You will presently become as meagre as Henrietta Sparrow."

"You pay me no great compliment," his friend chuckled, "although I had thought that Henrietta's sharp face seemed a little less angular, these last few times I have knocked at your door."

"Yes," Michael replied, "she takes on, lately, some faint semblance of being a human woman, after all; for you must understand, my dear Nicholas, that Henrietta has yielded to romance, and has bestowed something which by courtesy we might call her heart, upon a gallant sailorman; no other than Timothy Tripp."

"Henrietta—Tripp! That I can never believe!" exclaimed Nicholas. But Michael assured him that the evidence could not be doubted.

"He is there every evening in the kitchen, sipping a glass of thin punch, and when the nights are cool, has even the favor of a very small fire burning for his comfort. Henrietta sits opposite, knitting a gray wool sock

which can be destined for no larger man than Timothy. I seem to observe, as time goes on, that the punch seems to grow a little stronger and the fire becomes a more hearty blaze, as though the nature of Henrietta were being softened at last by the influence of love. She is far less harsh to me, also, than she used to be; for when the *Jocasta* goes to sea I shall be one of her officers, and Timothy Tripp sails with us at the mercy of my commands. She would never care to have a ship ruled with the heavy hand which she seeks to lay upon Mr. Hollister and upon me."

The *Jocasta* was now so nearly completed that the day for her launching could be appointed, and the time might almost be set for the later date when she would put to sea. Tidings began to go out over the countryside that the combined venture of the people of Branscomb had gone successfully so far, and that there might be opportunity for the small merchants and for the most prosperous farmers to despatch goods to be sold overseas.

There came one morning to the countingroom a weaver from an outlying hamlet not many miles from Branscomb. He bore upon his shoulders a great bale of smoothly woven canvas, the fruits of many a month of labor.

"You will be needing sailcloth now, Master Drury," he said, "and I know well that there are not a great number of weavers in your town to fill the need in time."

"What do you ask for your canvas?" Nicholas asked.

The weaver, a shriveled, gray-haired man, put his head on one side in shrewd calculation. "Two shillings the ell, if you pay me Spanish silver dollars," he said, "and four shillings if you pay me in johannes. And if the price is in that cross money which the sailors bring home from the West Indies, I must have five."

"But how if we should offer you paper currency of the United States?" Nicholas inquired.

"I will be honest with you, Master Drury, and trade you fair," he declared. "My good strong cloth is far better than your pictured paper; but just the same I will make equal exchange, bale for bale."

Michael, sitting on the other side of the table, laughed aloud. "Suppose we should tell you that we have no hard money left with which to buy your wares?" he said.

"Then I must even do as the shipwrights have been doing," the weaver answered. "If you will pay me a part of the value of what I have brought, I will look for the rest in the final profits of the voyage." His worn face brightened as he said further, "Can any of us, who have known Master Thomas Drury through a lifetime, fail to have pride in being taken as his partners into this, the venture of his finest ship?"

These difficulties in the matter of money made endless stumbling blocks in the carrying on of business. The new country had no coin of its own, the government possessing never an ounce of gold or silver from which it could be minted. All sorts of foreign currency were in use among the colonies, while the government's paper bills, called with disrespect "rag money," were valued at just the estimate which the weaver had put upon it. The powerless Congress had not been able to collect its taxes; and, not so very long since, it had even been forced to flee from Philadelphia to Trenton because a rabble of soldiers had gathered outside the doors of its meeting place, demanding the pay which a penniless government had been unable to provide.

It was small wonder that prosperity was dead and commerce at a standstill. The colonies were still uneasy and jealous of one another. In the South were warehouses full of produce, tobacco, indigo, and rice which could be sold overseas if there were ships to carry it. In New England there were some few vessels, but of

these, many were idle because little had been produced at home and the Southern planters were distrustful of their Yankee brothers-in-liberty and would not hire their ships to carry their goods abroad.

"I begin to understand that we do not know each other, the North and the South," Michael declared to Nicholas. "We lie so far apart and the way between is so difficult, that it is only by chance that travelers from our colonies see or understand anything of New England."

One or two bolder merchants of the country had sent ships far abroad to grasp at profit in a new field, the East India trade. From that venturesome voyage two had so far come home. But these had been single efforts which had not roused the spirit or interest of many others.

"Such adventuring is a pastime for the reckless and the wealthy," people said. The greater part of American shipping still hung a dead weight, on the hands of over-cautious owners.

"No one can tell to-day what will come upon us to-morrow," was their uneasy excuse.

A certain number of farseeing men had dared to face the fact that, with the clumsy, hastily formed rule of the Continental Congress, the country could never endure. There must be a new form of government or there would shortly be worse than none. Even now that gallant company was conferring in Philadelphia, striving to bring about some lasting plan for binding the colonies into union.

The postrider brought news day by day of what was going forward, only rumors it is true, for the councils were carried on behind locked doors. Now they were said to be coming to some agreement; now they were quarreling; now they were on the point of dispersing and returning to their homes. The fate of the new nation hung in the balance of their judgment; and no man could know what the end might be.

"We can only serve our land as stoutly as we can," Michael said with a sigh to Nicholas, when they had been discussing these grave matters. "Whether she will stand or fall depends upon the total of victories or of defeats in these multitudes of battles which we are all waging against the forces of circumstance."

Nicholas was less able to speak of those same thoughts within him; but he was none the less steadfastly resolved to maintain that same struggle. Yet even beyond the countrywide obstacles to prosperity, he found others, smaller, but equally menacing, which tended to block his progress. Certain merchants in some of the larger towns had been asked whether they would put goods into the new overseas venture. They had all answered, "No." Only one of them had told his reason plainly.

"It is an ill matter to have business with a man on the edge of ruin. We all think well of Thomas Drury, but we have the utmost we can do to keep some measure of prosperity ourselves. We cannot be dragged down by another's ill fortune."

Those men from whom it was necessary that Nicholas buy supplies flatly refused him credit.

"We must see your money," they all declared. "Yes, Thomas Drury was long our good patron, but we dare not help him now. We must help ourselves."

In all these refusals, Nicholas and Michael both could read something more ominous than mere lack of courage and generosity.

"It is Darius Corland," Michael had finally exclaimed and Nicholas had nodded. There was nothing more easy than to keep afloat the tale that Thomas Drury still stood at the brink of bankruptcy. And Darius, traveling back and forth from town to town in his chaise, knew just what word to drop in this man's ear, what shrug and smile to add to another's half-expressed doubt. Only

the people of low degree, those who had labored for Thomas Drury and had long looked to him for their safe living, still stood by him and his nephew. It was as the bent weaver said, as he turned to go:

"If what we could offer for this venture were measured by the regard and honor for Thomas Drury that dwells in all our hearts, then could no single ship carry the lading. But it is not so that matters run in this world."

Thomas Drury was better after this long passage of weeks, but even now only able to sit in an armchair by the window and not yet strong enough to attempt the passage of the stairs. He was a broken man, unable to turn his thoughts to any wearying matters of business. He could do little more than listen and smile and approve all that Nicholas and Michael had done.

"I will not hamper you with my feebleness," he said, but he loved, none the less, to sit and hearken by the hour as Nicholas recounted every detail of the work going forward—save those few having to do with the night prowlers in the countinghouse. Most especially he seemed to take pleasure in the name of the ship. He used to sit repeating it softly to himself — "*Jocasta, Jocasta.*" Whether his mind was upon the vessel or upon his shining memories of the past was a thing no one could know.

There was some secret matter brewing between Dolly and Phoebe, which seemed to occasion much whispering in corners and various unexplained activities behind closed doors upstairs. On being questioned, neither of the two would reveal anything save that Nicholas should know "in good time."

"Some girls' nonsense," he pronounced it. He had, so far, little notice for the doings of girls as a whole, although he felt such great and protective affection for Dolly. Michael, whose eyes were more alert for the flutter of petticoats, and who had a more interested

regard for feminine kind as a whole, was quite extraordinarily tormented by the mystery, and often let fall words which showed that he was cudgeling his wits to guess what it could be.

"The contagion is spreading to all the maids in Branscomb," he told Nicholas presently. "Such whispering and twittering, such secret conferences on the corners of streets, such fallings into a silence of nods and meaning looks when any of us pass by! Nothing like it was ever before seen!"

Even Nicholas, the absorbed and unobservant, presently began to see that, indeed, the palpitating mystery was becoming general. At last, greatest marvel of all, Michael came into the countinghouse one morning and announced:

"Henrietta Sparrow is in it!"

"In what?" questioned Nicholas, looking up from a letter and bringing his attention back with difficulty from the question of how many running yards of canvas should go into the *Jocasta's* main topgallant sail.

"In the conspiracy which has caused so much fluttering in the dovecotes during these last weeks," his friend replied. "When I went home last evening, she and your sister were whispering in the passage and they stopped and gave me that same 'If-you-but-knew-all' look which I have seen lately upon every girl's face in Branscomb. I will own that as Dolly and Henrietta stood together, there was some slight difference in their countenances, but the expressions upon them were exactly alike."

Even Mr. Hugh Hollister, coming to see Nicholas upon that weary business which must always go with great undertakings which suffer from the scarcity of money, even the gentle lawyer said plaintively, "That minx of a Dolly has been upsetting my good Henrietta. I have had burned porridge for breakfast three days in succession, and that is always an indication of something most grievously wrong."

"Your good Henrietta is said to be in love," Nicholas informed him, chuckling at the impossibility of the idea.

"So Michael attempts to tell me," agreed Mr. Hollister, "though I try not to believe it. A great misfortune it would be for me, should Henrietta marry. Timothy Tripp has hung about my house for a matter of twenty years or so, therefore I am not sure that affair is any nearer settlement than it ever has been. This new disturbance has been manifest only in the last few days. It is Dolly, and some scheme or other which she has in her busy head. When I see women making plans together, I am always uneasy."

"I can make nothing of it," Nicholas finally admitted to Michael. "Perhaps the girls are preparing some ceremony for the day of the launching."

"No," Michael assured him, "Dolly has told me this much, that we are not to know of it until the *Jocasta* is almost ready for sea. It is Dolly who is at the bottom of it all, yet she can be persuaded to tell nothing. She has a tongue like a sphinx and a mind like a humming hive of bees."

Late summer was slowly ripening into early autumn; and through all the months the work had gone forward steadily. The *Jocasta* stood whole and stately upon the ways, ready at last for her launching. The carving of an eagle, which was to be her figurehead, was set in its place. Dolly was to christen the new vessel; the battered drummers and fifers of the Branscomb patriot company, who had piped and beaten their long roll for the victory of Saratoga, were to be at hand to attend the ship with music as she slipped into the water. All the townspeople, all the country folk for miles around, were to come to see the ship, their ship, as she took the sea. Michael and Nicholas had long, busy hours attending to final details; Caleb Harmon looked as though the weight of the

universe rested upon his shoulders. Phoebe, glancing out at an ominously cloudy sunset, told her husband and Dolly, nevertheless, that the coming day would be fair.

Michael and Nicholas did not hear her augury. Nicholas was in his place in the little room above the wharf, still toiling at his endless accounting. There were very few who would ever know the tangled difficulties through which he had labored to find the money for the project of his heart. The men had worked for little, but it was necessary for them to live. Timber and iron, copper and canvas—all had to be bought, and all must be of the very best. With what grinding toil he and Michael had struggled through this portion of the work, what scraping together of dollars, what stretching of shillings, what squeezing even of pennies. And how Michael had helped him! How Michael had persuaded and cajoled the cautious or selfish men who hung back from any dealing with the half-ruined Drury affairs. What pictures he had drawn before timid eyes of the success of the project, of all the boldness that it stood for, all the good that it was to accomplish!

Yet neither he, with his easy flow of words, nor Nicholas with his deeply rooted earnestness, had ever spoken together of that resolution at the bottom of everything, to which they both had set their faces on the night of their first meeting. Yet in furthering their real end, each one had whole-heartedly done his share.

Nicholas closed his ledger and went to the window opening to the sea. Although it was autumn, the night was still like summer, black and starless, but with long lines of the pale phosphorescent fire breaking on the beaches, clinging to the piles, fringing the curl of the breakers, as they came rolling in. He listened intently to the cool washing of the waves as they came stealing up just below him. How plainly they were calling to the

ship—and now she was coming. Whither would they carry her; whither would those soft winds drive her? Had he built her so that, so far as man could contrive it, she would go safe? Had he, of a surety, put into her the very best that was in him? He knew that he had.

He turned aside at last, closed the window, put out the candles and went forth into the long countinghouse. Some one arose in the dusk of the scantily lit room. It was Michael, waiting for him patiently, as he had so many times before, even though patience was no great part of his eager being. They did not speak but went out together into the still darkness.

The whole place was empty and quiet, with here and there, at a distance, a bobbing lantern or two, showing where the watchmen made their rounds. Better guard was kept now, since the adventure of the two marauders; but there had never been a repetition of that attack. More ominous sign of Darius Corland's hostility had been that stubborn wall of disbelief and refusal which had ringed them in on every side where they had looked for help. But even that had not withheld success, for here was the *Jocasta* towering above them, the work of all these months, the fruit of caution and boldness, of discouragement and hope.

It was the custom in the Drury yards to step the masts before launching, so that the ship seemed almost ready for the sea. By unspoken consent the two stopped to stand together under her bow. With the rake of her masts disappearing into the dark, with the upward lift of her bows and bowsprit, the sweeping curve of her stern, she seemed to be alive, looking far away over their heads, tense and listening, impatient of long delay. Nicholas laid his hand upon her smooth oak planking, almost as though he expected to feel life throbbing beneath it. The two stood for a long time, each thinking

of all that ship was to bear away, over the rim of the world, past the unknown horizons of the future.

"She stands for the whole of us, Nicholas," Michael said at last, and his comrade nodded. All they possessed, both of outer, worldly goods, and also of the things within, were freighted in that vessel. By their work together they had come to be bound in such friendship as passed far beyond the hero-worshiping affection which Michael had felt for Etienne Bardeau. They understood each other too perfectly to have need of speech, it was to himself that Michael said, under his breath, yet answering the stir in Nicholas' heart, "Lives, fortunes,—and sacred honor."

One other had come to say good-by to her also. Some one moved close to them, hidden by the black shadows, then became vaguely visible, stepping into the open space where they stood. It was Caleb Harmon, bent and knotted with the hard toil of long years, laying, in his turn, a big, work-hardened hand upon the planks he had helped to set in place. He too had come to stand, for a moment, by this vessel of theirs, on the last night that she was still the shipwrights', before the sea should take her. Neither minded that he had overheard the words which Michael had spoken for both of them. He volunteered no speech, and presently walked away into the darkness. His muttered words came back to them:

"Young hearts, young hearts!"

There was a touch of frost in the air next day, with the haze of autumn hanging on the hills and on the far horizon. There was warmth and sun, however, over the shipyards where, from the hour of early morning, people had begun to gather. The town crier, Abner Hoxie, had announced the great event in his enormous voice, standing in the market square and ringing his great bell; but all the bystanders had merely laughed to hear him, for

they had known his tidings long before. There was no dweller in the town, from those who could scarcely walk on account of great age to those who could not walk at all on account of extreme youth, who was not to be there. Branscomb was a small, compact village, closely built to the very water's edge and following the crescent of the harbor line. It was at the northward curve of the shore that the shipyards lay with their docks and piers, just before the rocky land reached far out in the high rugged point of Branscomb Head. On that morning every street in the village seemed to lead to but one point, the Drury yards where the *Jocasta* waited.

To-day at last all the roads into the town were full of travelers, since every one in that portion of the county was bound for the launching. There were wagons and carts, there were men mounted upon rough-coated horses taken from the plough, there were women seated on the pillions behind. There were chaises, and there were gentlemen in laced coats and cocked hats, riding their blooded steeds to the same rendezvous. Many a solid merchant from many a distant town had left his counting-house that morning and, drawn by curiosity, real interest, or old friendship for Thomas Drury, had come to see the Branscomb launching.

"A strange venture!" one would observe to another, as they met upon the way. "They say that every man who has worked upon the ship has a share in her, and that who knows how many score will have part in making up her cargo. I never thought the ship would even be built; but now they tell me that she will clear within the month for the West Indies and the Mediterranean."

"I trust she comes back safely and with profit," the usual answer would be. "If so, I may even consider sending a vessel to sea again myself, but in due time—in due time. A man cannot be too careful."

A great deal of the talk upon the highway was about that assembly in Philadelphia which had now come near to the end of its labors and before very long would submit the new plan of government to Congress and to the people of the new United States.

"There could be no worse moment for such an undertaking as the sailing of this ship," said a wise merchant to a friend equally wise, as they jogged along the road, side by side. "Here we have let it be admitted at last that our present government is worthless; and no one may know whether the new one will avail us better. It is no time at all for any prudent person to risk what little he has in commercial adventure."

"You are right," responded his companion. "These are perilous times. He is a foolhardy lad, this Nicholas Drury, who, they tell me, is at the bottom of the Branscomb enterprise. Yet, somehow I begin to like his bold spirit."

The heaviness of doubt, however, was in the hearts of the few, and gay hope was in the hearts of the many, as all gathered for the great event. They thronged the gates of the shipyard, they packed the open space from boundary to boundary. Wreaths of little boys decorated the tall piles of timber and lumber, or hung precariously from derricks and staging. Thomas Drury had been carried down from the inn by a group of stout-armed workmen who had fought for the privilege. He sat now in his great armchair at his proper place on the platform built up near the vessel's bow, a white ghost of the man he had been, looking a little dazed by all the tumult, but with a happier face than he had worn for many years past. Dolly, Phoebe and Caleb Harmon, Michael and Nicholas crowded close about him. Serene above them all, alone unstirred by the excitement of the moment, decked out with colored flags and streamers, the *Jocasta* waited for the touch which should set her free.

At the last moment the chaise of Darius Corland rolled up to the gates, and he got out with Joseph Ryall, to stand on the outskirts of the crowd. Now and again he tried to speak in a low tone to this man or that who stood near, words probably still of doubt and disparagement. But not even the merchants come from afar had ears to heed him to-day. All were intent upon what was going forward.

There was no speech making, and little ceremony. The *Jocasta* was duly christened; there was a moment of silence in which it was quite certain that every man who had served her through all the time of building must be saying something like a prayer within his heart. Then the music struck up, the thin high notes of the fifes and the steady rolling beat of the drums, which recalled as nothing else could have done, the immortal sound of soldiers' feet marching away from home and hearthfire to do battle for liberty.

Through the drumming and fifing there came now the noise of the beating mallets. They were driving home the wedges beneath the *Jocasta's* keel, to lift her from the ground and throw her weight upon the slipway. The last one was struck into place; then the men leaped back to safety. There ran a tremor through the whole length of the ship; she had hearkened to the sea calling her at last. With a movement as majestic as that of a king's daughter stepping forth in her robes of state, she glided down the ways. Puffs of smoke and flashes of fire attended her sliding course, so great was the friction as the tremendous weight slipped, with such apparent ease, down the course appointed. She dipped to the water, righted herself and floated, a creature of the sea now, and never to be a land dweller again. A roar went up, to which that first cry which had hailed the plan for building her was now as nothing. Yet its burden was the same.

"Nicholas! Nicholas Drury!"

"It should be for the others too," Nicholas protested, but the shout only gathered volume and drowned what he strove to say.

Michael turned to the weather-wise Phoebe Harmon who stood at his elbow. "Whither will she sail, Phoebe, and what storms will she see?"

"Nay, sir, that can be only as God Himself shall direct," she answered. "And may He bring her safe home to us again."

At the edge of the crowd, Mr. Corland was turning away to journey homeward. Not far from him, a stout merchant was saying, with no very great heed that he should not hear:

"I have never felt so greatly as I do to-day, the impulse to be back at sea-trading again. I begin to think that we have listened too long to croakings and warnings and overwhelming arguments. I, for one, am weary of having Darius Corland, in his bottle-green coat, drive over me with his chaise and four."

It was, perhaps, a busier month than any of those just past, the time during which the *Jocasta* lay at the dock, being rigged and equipped with sails, while, at the same time, her cargo was being got on board. A strange and miscellaneous collection of wares it was, which people day after day, some of them traveling from afar, kept bringing to Nicholas and Michael. Lumber, barrels of salt beef and pork, great round yellow cheeses by the hundred-weight, and bales of linsey-woolsey cloth, the work of the weavers of half a dozen villages.

"There seems to be overmuch of blue and scarlet dye used," Nicholas observed to Michael doubtfully, as they inspected these last contributions.

"They have heard, I think, that their sober butternut and russet do not sell to good advantage outside of New England," Michael replied. "I think we may well venture

it, not for selling in the West Indies, but in some farther port which we shall visit later. There is nowhere in Europe where they weave just such fabrics as these of your colony."

It was well understood that the *Jocasta* was to follow some such course as Nicholas had mentioned in his first talk of the matter with Mr. Hollister and Mr. Corland. The purpose of the voyage was not only to gain profit in known ports, but to seek out new markets for the future trade of America.

And now at last came to light that secret over which Dolly Drury and her friends had been buzzing and whispering for so many weeks past. Michael and Nicholas had heard, lately, fewer hints of the great mystery which was in hand, and Michael, indeed, had observed to Nicholas that the countenances of the young ladies even began to appear somewhat downcast, and that their smiles and knowing looks were far less in evidence than before. The two had in fact more or less dropped the matter from their minds. They were taken entirely by surprise on that afternoon when Dolly came walking down the length of the countingroom with a great burden in her arms which she laid upon the table before them.

She was dressed in her best, with ruffled kerchief and scarlet ribbons and with the tumbling curls of her dark hair drawn into their most demure order. Her bright eyes and the brilliant color, coming and going in her cheeks, belied the weighty and sedate expression which she had put on with as much care as her rose-flowered bonnet. It was with the gravest dignity of manner that she unfolded the brown holland covering of her bundle and said simply:

"I have brought this to help make up the lading of the *Jocasta*. If you think well of it, there is much more which you may have."

What she had brought was a great web of white linen, so smoothly spun and so perfectly woven as to have a sheen and beauty beyond the finest satin. Nicholas looked at it in astonishment and Michael passed an appreciative hand over its shining surface.

"Where I live," he said, "such linen as this belongs only to the daughters of great houses, and is laid by with lavender and lemon verbena in their marriage chests."

"That is just what it is," cried Dolly, in delight that he had divined the truth so quickly. Her grave manner broke into a thousand ripples of released excitement. "Where you live, I suppose the black women do the spinning and weaving, but here in New England every girl, as soon as she is big enough to turn a wheel, is bound to work every day toward the filling of her dower chest. Sometimes they do the weaving themselves, sometimes it is done for them; but any maid would feel disgraced should she reach the age of sixteen and not have the proper number of yards of linen laid by for her wedding day. I—I—while I am spinning I seem to think about a thousand other things than wedding days," she admitted in conclusion, "but I love to hear the whir of the wheel and I have, so Phoebe says, good fingers for the thread. So I have quite as much as any other maid in Branscomb."

"But even though you should be so brave as to bring your wedding linen to us," said Michael, "this is scarcely enough to carry overseas."

"Ah, this is but a little portion of what I have, brought to see whether it would pass the muster of your and Nicholas' critical eyes. How much do you think a nimble girl can spin and weave during her growing years? Not only I, but all the maids of Branscomb are bringing theirs also. Cannot women take part in a merchant's venture as well as men? Have they not, sometimes, also, a thrifty eye for trade? What made me first think of it

was Phoebe's saying that daughters could be like their fathers as well as sons."

Nicholas looked down upon the roll of linen in some doubt, as an elder brother might be expected to do. But Michael was already whole-heartedly won over to approve the venture.

"If there is enough of it," he declared, "it should be indeed most excellent for us to offer in the markets of the West Indies. There can be nothing like this to be bought and sold there."

"But there must be slaves to do all the weaving they need for the West Indian people of means," objected Nicholas.

"And do you think," Dolly defended her plan stoutly to him, "that slave women can produce the same fair work as industrious young ladies making ready their dowries? You cannot tell me, Michael, that even on your own plantation those good black mammies of which you have told us, or those bouncing Negro girls, can produce such a web as this."

"No indeed," agreed Michael. "I have never seen the equal of this in all my days."

"Nor can you make me believe," Dolly persisted, "that the fine ladies of the West Indies, dwelling in those great houses of which we hear, with their flowered court-yards and their polished mahogany floors, do not wish for such linens as make glad the hearts of housewives wherever they may go. And there may be even some members of your sex, Nicholas, who would be pleased to use the best cambric in New England for the ruffles of their shirts and similar furbelows. Have I not heard that they are so particular about their wine that they have it shipped at Oporto and carried out to India or China and back again for its proper aging in a vessel's hold; that many of them cannot take pleasure in drink-

ing port or Madeira that has not doubled the Cape of Good Hope? I think men so choice as those West Indian planters and merchant princes may recognize something of equal rarity and merit for the adornment of their persons. Such wares as these we offer are never sold in shops or market stalls; they are hoarded and treasured and passed down from one woman to another, generation by generation." She paused, breathless.

"And you would part with all this?" asked Michael.

"We can begin at once to make more," returned Dolly with courage. "It is only one thing in addition toward making the *Jocasta* the best-laden as well as the finest ship on all the seas. It shall not be our fault if she does not go richly cargoes to seek all of our fortunes. Nicholas still looks doubtful," she concluded, "but remember Dick Whittington's cat and her value in the country where cats were unknown. You can bring this back to me, Michael, in the form of rubies and diamonds." And she pushed the web of linen across the table into his hands.

"I vow that I will, or in something which you will like just as well," Michael exclaimed. "Amid our coarse cargo of beef and cheese, this will surely outweigh in value everything else."

"But are you sure you have enough?" questioned Nicholas, convinced finally but still hard-heartedly reluctant.

"Come and see," Dolly bade him, and not being able to wait for his deliberate footsteps, she seized him by the arm and hurried him violently toward the door. "We are just like all good merchants, and have brought our wares for your most unbelieving inspection."

They were not exactly so business-like as she had boasted, these maids of Branscomb who had offered their hoarded treasure for the support of the *Jocasta's* fortunes. They had secured a great hay wagon, drawn

by farmer Holstead's red and white spotted oxen; they had piled their bales high upon it and had decorated their offering with wreaths and with boughs of scarlet autumn leaves. They had hung garlands of gay flowers around the necks and upon the horns of the oxen; and if it seemed as though their gift were decked out for the sacrifice, and as though some of the maidens appeared a little mournful over parting with the work of their loving hands, it was all the more tribute to their brave spirits and to the persuasive leadership of Dolly Drury.

"There is more still to come," Dolly explained, "but just for the first which we brought, we piled it upon the biggest wain which we could find, so as to make a glorious showing."

It was indeed amazing what industry could produce. Wagonload after wagonload of the beautiful linens came rolling down to the wharf, there to be unloaded and the contents borne on board the *Jocasta*. Some young women had less to offer, some had more; but since they were all to be dowerless together, there was no reason for any one to hang back. Henrietta Sparrow was the Cræsus of the town. When she had emptied her chests and cupboards, a single cart could not bear away the whole of the spoils.

"She was always telling me that she must spin and weave and make ready a little longer before she would think of wedding with any man," Timothy Tripp told Michael, in a burst of tender confidence. "But I do believe some change has come over her and she has made up her mind that she will have me at last. I have asked her, between voyages, for seventeen years and she has never failed to say no. But now she declares that if the journey of the *Jocasta* brings success, then she will perhaps think of altering her mind. How did it come about? What man can box the compass of a woman's mind?"

Michael was now more occupied even than Nicholas; for it was upon his shoulders that the burden of their project was to fall. The *Jocasta* was to have as captain John Douglas, an old acquaintance of Thomas Drury's, a trusted and able man, from the neighboring port of Melford. He was to bring his own first officer, Charles Brigham, and from his town, also, a number of the crew were to be drawn, as had often been the case upon Thomas Drury's vessels. "Branscomb built and Melford manned" was a saying current among seafarers as standing for the sum of desired excellence in a ship.

There were, also, many sailors available in Branscomb who were to sail upon the *Jocasta*, very conspicuous among them being Timothy Tripp. His small body possessed quite extraordinary strength, and was also so agile that his feats upon the yards were a byword of wonder. He had sailed many voyages for Thomas Drury; but he was a somewhat pathetic figure now, grown thin with "unnatural life ashore," as he put it,—shabby and restless and always longing for his true occupation. It was strange to see how his countenance now grew broader and more smiling, how his shambling walk was developing a swagger, as he came nearer and nearer to the day when he was to be upon his own element once more.

Michael, who had studied navigation and gained experience during his voyages on the *Deux Frères* was to do the work of second officer, although he also was to represent the owners and take charge of selling and buying the cargo. With this portion of the undertaking, Captain Douglas would have nothing to do.

"I've no use for figures, except in determining a position or laying a course," he declared. "I would sail a ship to the end of the world and back for Thomas Drury, but no one must ask me to touch the trading. With the dollars and the moidores and the guineas and the louis,

a man can be set fairly beside himself and have no wits for the day's reckoning."

Preparations were at last ended, the rigging was completed, the cargo stowed; the *Jocasta* had been tried and found to equal her commander's most critical demands. Space had been left in the hold for goods that were to be picked up later, since Michael purposed to touch at Charleston and take on tobacco, cotton and rice. As often happens between two who cannot live together in harmony, he and his brother found themselves in something like agreement when they were many miles apart and communication was by letter. They had arranged between them that the *Jocasta* should be the first Northern ship to carry a Southern cargo, a combination of effort for which the needs of the country cried aloud.

After Charleston, they were to touch at French ports in the West Indies, since American ships were not permitted to sell goods to the British Islands. From the West Indies, they were to head most probably for Mediterranean markets,—French, Spanish, Italian and finally perhaps for those gateways to the Eastern trade, Smyrna and Constantinople. The American flag was to be carried far, so that all might see and understand that the new nation founded on liberty still endured.

It is the custom with sailors that farewells be casual, and that he who is setting forth for the farthest port which the wide world offers must say good-by as carelessly as though he were going for a saunter across the market square.

"If you were only to go with us," Michael said to Nicholas, as he had said a hundred times before, and with no change in his voice because this time was the last.

"When a person knows what he does best, it were better that he do it," Nicholas answered steadily. "And

it will be a task for us all to uphold what little prosperity we have, until you come to port again."

It is easier to go away than to be gone away from,—that Nicholas could have told his friend, but he did not.

Michael came up to the Blackbird Inn in the early evening to bid good-by to Thomas Drury; for he was to sail upon the morrow. He, Nicholas and Dolly walked once more down the garden, to the head of the Marsh Road. The plum trees were dropping small crimson and orange leaves, leaving the crooked branches bare for the first faint stars to shine through. The marsh, so lately full of flashing wings, swinging blackbirds and the brilliant greens of summer, had now dropped into silence and the somberness of autumn colors. The wind sighed through the dry grasses, and the sea was very loud upon the shore beyond. Michael was to see and hear and feel that picture in his heart to the farthest end of his journeying.

Next day the tide did not serve until late afternoon, and there was bustle of preparation to the last hour. In that long room, where the two had worked together through such difficulty to success, Michael gripped Nicholas' hand, and turned to the door without a word. It was the whole of their leave-taking.

The *Jocasta* weighed anchor, spread, fold by fold, her new white canvas, swung out into the tideway, caught the evening breeze and moved in slow beauty down the harbor. Those who stood on the wharf to watch her going saw her veer and tack and stand out to double Branscomb Head. Now she was close-hauled, moving away from them with her sails showing edgewise and crescent-shaped, her masts dipping as she rose and fell to the long, rolling swells.

Long after the others had taken their way homeward, Nicholas still stood watching her, a distant fleeting vision, slowly disappearing across that vast plain, so enormous

in the twilight, whose far boundaries touched the edges of mystery. The last sunset light had touched her as she swung about beyond the point, showing once more and finally her clean grace, her fair white spread of new sail, her fresh, untried power. She was his. Others had aided in bringing her into being, but not as he had done. Without him she would never have been planned, never have been carried to completion, would never have put to sea. There was no vanity in that surge of satisfaction which went flooding through him, only the honest pride of one who has put his best of dreams and labor into a certain task, and has seen them take enduring form before his eyes. No matter what was to come in that blind space called the future, be it pain, disappointment or tragedy, nothing could take from him this moment in which he watched the live beauty of that ship as she sailed away, to feel that this was the work of his hands, to know that work was good.





CHAPTER VII

SUNRISE OFF BRANSCOMB HEAD

More than merely one of those men of substance who had watched the launching of the *Jocasta* had not been able to see her slip down the ways and take the sea without feeling a stirring within him and a sudden revulsion against the cautious policy which he had been following. Massachusetts had always been the foremost trading colony; it would never do to see her lose her place. In spite of themselves, their minds began to linger and dally upon the dream of overseas commerce once again. The warnings and prophecies of Darius Corland began to lose their potency.

"Perhaps this sea adventuring is not really the rich man's sport which we have considered it," the merchants began to speculate to one another. And there were several into whose hearts had stolen the thought, "If a young boy and a broken man can get so fine a vessel as the *Jocasta* to sea, it may be that even a careful man of business might think of doing likewise. They say that there is tobacco in Virginia and iron in Pennsylvania for which the markets of Massachusetts are crying aloud."

Somehow it came about that the postrider began to bring to Nicholas scattered letters from seaport towns up and down the coast. Could he undertake repairs and refitting of such and such a vessel, built during the war for a privateer and now idle but able to be of possible profit in the coastwise trade? He could.

Many of these inquiries came to nothing; but little by little there dribbled into the Drury shipyards a very small portion of their once thriving trade. A barque which had been a French prize was put in order for a man who purposed to bring pig iron from the mouth of the Delaware; a topsail schooner was made ready for the sea for an even bolder spirit who thought that he might try buying cotton in the South to carry to Boston. The rebuilding and the refitting made slow, unexciting work of no very great profit; but they marked the first reward for that bold stroke of laying the keel of the *Jocasta* in a troubled time when men's faith in ships was gone. It kept the men busy and safe from pressing want; but it afforded a scarcely visible surplus for the fallen Drury fortunes. Nicholas toiled long and earnestly to accomplish the work efficiently and at a price reasonable enough to tempt timid venturers into greater undertakings.

"When the *Jocasta* once comes home again," he kept promising himself, "then all men will know that it is not merely the few and great who dare hazard their substance upon the sea." Over and over he counted the time which must pass before the return of the ship, a month for the West Indian portion of the voyage, two more before she could reach Gibraltar, three or four to be spent trading in the Mediterranean,—at the very most eight or nine months before they might count on her return. It would be the high tide of summer when they might look to see her again. Nicholas could see just how she would look, standing in from Branscomb Head, beating up the harbor

with good fortune for them all stored safe within her hold, and with glory for her country in the record she had left behind her. But they must all buckle their courage tight to endure through the long waiting.

The winter was upon them, yet with sufficient open weather to allow the work to proceed. The whole country was throbbing with uneasy excitement; for one colony after another was weighing the question of the new government; and half the people were vowing that they must, and the other half that they must not, join together in the final Union there laid down. Through all of January and February, Massachusetts rocked with the argument as to whether this important State should lead a number of smaller waiting ones into the great step of ratifying the Constitution.

"It will be the beginning of a magnificent era of history," proclaimed one set of orators.

"It will be the end of all stable things," proclaimed others with equal vehemence. "Men cannot change their governments as they change their coats."

Amid all this turmoil it was not to be marveled at that commerce took no great strides forward, yet still the hammers of the Branscomb shipwrights worked steadily through the winter and into the spring. Only once had news of the *Jocasta* come back to her company of owners, but "she has gone on a long voyage," they said to each other and forbore to speak other than cheerfully.

By February, Massachusetts, with some misgivings and reservations, had stepped cautiously into the Federal Union. The loud talk that the South might make a Confederacy of its own began to die away. It was mid-summer night when bonfires lighted on all the hills, and bells ringing in all the church spires, proclaimed that the majority of colonies had accepted the new Constitution and that government of the people, for the people and by

the people was assured. Not since those same bells, twelve years before, had pealed out the proclamation of liberty and independence, had any message of such great import been declared to the world. New Hampshire had been the deciding State to join. But Nathan Stiles, the postrider, galloping southward with the great news, passed the dusty northbound messenger who bore the great tidings that Virginia too stood with the rest. It was late autumn before the last little State slipped into her place. But meanwhile the wheels of stable government had slowly begun to revolve.

History has shown us, in the bloody and appalling records of the French and the Russian revolutions, what can happen when liberty-seeking people cast away their old government and fail to agree upon a new one. The whole nation of the United States must ever be grateful to those minds who planned and wrought our Constitution; but it must also offer honor to many unnamed upholders of order and peace, who kept their hearts true and their heads steady while the tremendous changes were going forward, who looked with hopeful courage into the future rather than let themselves fall into blind panic during the confusion of the present.

Spring had stepped through the doorway of summer, when there came one day a surprising visitor to the countinghouse to ask for Nicholas Drury. A man of courteous and dignified manners it was, with the ruddy face of a sailor, the bearing of one who could be no less than the commander of a ship, and the accent of speech which spoke him plainly as a subject of King George.

When he and Nicholas were established in the small private room, where the windows stood open to the heat of the late June morning, the stranger drew from his pocket a letter which he put into the boy's hand.

"I was asked to see that this came safely to you, and

since it was given me by one whom I greatly regard and honor, I came over the miles from the port where my ship lies that I might deliver it to you myself."

Nicholas broke the seal, glanced at the brief page of unfamiliar writing, then smiled over the name at the end as one does on catching sight of the face of a long-unseen friend. It was from Etienne Bardeau.

He looked up inquiringly at the messenger who had given his name as Captain Hart of the British ship *Northumberland*, of the port of Liverpool.

"You had it from Etienne Bardeau himself? You know him?" he asked.

The other nodded. "I know him well, and all of his hopes and ambitions. Englishmen love liberty as part of their nature; and I am one of those who respect the men who are striving to bring liberty where tyranny has stood so long. I have given Etienne Bardeau passage on my ship more than once; we have talked of his adventures and escapes, and we have talked of you. As I have come along the way, I have heard news of you in the speech of the people, fellow travelers in the coaches or men whom I have talked to at the inns. I have learned what it is that you have undertaken; I offer you my congratulations and my great hope that you will succeed. You have had good news from your ship, I trust."

"No," Nicholas answered. "We had a message from the West Indies when they had first arrived at Port au Prince, and sent word back by a northbound French brigantine. That was in December."

"December—and this is June! And since the first time, you have heard nothing?" exclaimed the English Captain.

Nicholas shook his head. "Nothing," he affirmed. His throat was dry, so that the difficult word would scarcely pass.

The man seemed to be looking backward over the memory of past months. "The *Jocasta*! did I not hear that so she was named? And bound for Mediterranean ports? I have touched at some such myself, Marseilles, Barcelona, and Palermo and nowhere have I heard sailors' speech of her. News of an American ship in those unvisited ports ought to run fast and far."

Nicholas got up from his place and went to stand looking out at the window. The hot glitter of morning sun was upon the smooth sea, streaked here and there with chance ripples, but mostly colorless as it always is before the slanted rays of afternoon have brought out its fathomless shades of blue.

"There are many reasons why we may not have got tidings of her," he declared bravely, as he had so many times, before, within himself. "I look for the *Jocasta* to come safely to port within a month or two, just the same."

"You are right, sir," agreed the Englishman earnestly. "The chances of the sea may easily have carried word astray. You will see her swing into the harbor mouth in her own good time. With all my heart I wish you the best of fortune for her."

Nicholas turned about, surprised.

"There are not many of your country," he observed, "who have offered us just that wish."

"There are more, perhaps, than you know," the other answered him. "Men are of many different opinions in these changing days; there are some, it may be, on this side of the Atlantic who call themselves Americans, who still hope that your country will not go forward in progress and success; while there are those of us who are watching you across the water, who know that it is by just such ventures as yours that the United States will establish herself in honor before the eyes of all the world." In the cool shadiness of the little room he looked squarely across

at Nicholas with the glance of one man who understands the courage and ideals of another. "Although your years are not great, I will ask you to think of this. If a man has an elder son, who goes out into the world to make his own fortune, does not the father always hope that the lad will acquit himself well before all men? The war between us is over and settled. There is kinship between our countries still, and in the hearts of many of us is the thought that there will be a special sting in your doing ill, a special pride in your coming to success and honor."

He must return to his ship, he told Nicholas, who urged hospitality upon him, but first he was persuaded to take his way to the Blackbird Inn where he sat talking for an hour with Thomas Drury. The sick man brightened in the stranger's company; and the two exchanged anecdotes of voyages in his uncle's past about which Nicholas had scarcely known. He wondered to hear them letting fall the names of ports of which he had only vaguely heard. Cronstadt, Algeciras, and Cumana. At last the new acquaintance was forced to take his leave and rumbled away in the southbound coach to rejoin his ship.

After he was gone, Nicholas drew forth once more the letter which he had given so hasty a perusal. In the little room at the back of the inn, beside the window where Etienne Bardeau had first looked in upon him, he sat down to read his message through again.

My dear distant friend,—it began.—As I go up and down the world, I wonder many times how it has fared with you and that red-haired child of impulse who, I am convinced, has now become your esteemed and trusted comrade. Those winds of destiny, of which I told you, can already be felt beginning to blow across our land, but the real tempest is not yet come. In a year, it may be those thunders and lightnings will commence to play which are to usher in French liberty. In the course of that year, it is my earnest hope, chance may cast me upon your shores

again and I may see you and that erstwhile and well-beloved companion of my wanderings, Michael Slade. Your unforgetting friend, Etienne Bardeau.

Nicholas refolded the paper slowly. It had meant much to hear news of his French friend; but the sight of that letter had aroused such a leap of hope that here might be tidings of Michael and the *Jocasta*, that the disappointment was almost beyond bearing. He felt sick and shaken, and his fingers trembled as he laid together the folds of the crackling paper. Even after he had seen that it was from Etienne he had still felt a wild belief that there was word of Michael in it, that these two had somehow found each other in those crowded ports beyond the Atlantic. But there was nothing; the letter was as empty of the desired news as that gray stretch of water beyond the window was bare of a single sail.

Dolly, coming suddenly in at the door, saw him standing there with the letter in his hand.

"Is it—is it from Michael?" she cried. Then, as Nicholas shook his head, she buried her face in her hands and burst into a flood of tears. Only once or twice since she had been a small child had her brother seen her weep. He put a steadying arm about her and sought to offer comfort.

"We will hear of them yet," he asserted steadily. "We have only to wait a little longer."

He took courage and hope himself in the effort to ease her terror.

The summer passed with the *Jocasta* long overdue; the autumn came and she had been gone a year. Men talked of her as missing, rather than as a vessel whose return was still to be expected. The autumn wore slowly by and a cold, blustery winter dragged lengthy months over those who still, in their hearts, stoutly maintained that they were only waiting.

By the time the summer was again at hand, work had begun to lag greatly in the Branscomb yards. In other places business and trade were beginning slowly to come to life again; but here, where the first forward impetus had been felt, even such small prosperity as they had once had was slipping away.

"Your efforts seem to be unlucky," grinned Joseph Ryall, when he met Nicholas upon the street corner one day. Kind little Mr. Hollister had sought to comfort him, but his own attitude had been of one who had completely abandoned hope, so that his words had been of no help. The grim look upon the face of Henrietta Sparrow was something terrible to see.

Nicholas knew well that where once the launching of the *Jocasta* had won an increase of prosperity, her non-return was now driving it away.

"Just sailed off and was never heard of again," he heard a merchant from Melford saying to a traveler from a more distant town, as they dismounted together one day before the Blackbird Inn. Then, seeing that Nicholas was coming out through the door, the first one stated his business at once. "It was to see you, Mr. Drury, that I have ridden hither. There was some talk of your refitting a ship for me, but I have reconsidered the matter. I—I find it can be done to somewhat better advantage elsewhere."

Even in his smarting disappointment Nicholas realized that it was out of friendship for him and for Thomas Drury that the man had come in person to tell him what he had decided. Other messages of the same nature but more abruptly worded, had reached him by letter. The tongue of Darius Corland was beginning to be very busy.

Again Nicholas began to be conscious, as he had been at the commencement of his great undertaking, that, beyond that small region in which he lived, an unyielding

wall of doubt and disbelief hemmed him in on every side. Michael, perhaps, might have done something to convince and persuade, so he often reflected, but at the thought a stab of agony would go through him, for the essence of the tragedy was that Michael was not at hand.

Knowing that he was of little worth at the task of cajoling doubtful merchants, Nicholas made no effort to counteract that talk which Mr. Corland and Mr. Ryall were so industriously spreading abroad. It seemed as though Darius Corland had at last become convinced that it was not Nicholas' purpose to use his letter against him and had taken courage. He had made no further effort to recover the missive, nor had that curious pair, Hezekiah and his long companion, ever shown their faces in Branscomb again. Mr. Corland, with reviving assurance, was doing his utmost for the further undoing of the Drurys, uncle and nephew. With the property which he had purchased added to his former holdings, he was beginning to be looked upon as one of the great landed men of the State. His word carried weight wherever it went.

Besides a scant succession of fishing vessels brought to Branscomb for repairs from time to time, Nicholas had upon the stocks a stout, chubby little brig which her owner had entrusted to him for rejuvenating after long neglect.

"Her bottom has not been cleaned for half a lifetime," Caleb Harmon commented, in righteous scorn for one who would thus ill treat so valuable a thing as a ship. "The growth upon it is so thick that it looks like Widow Stone's garden. I declare I find myself looking amongst the barnacles and weeds for gilly-flowers and mignonette."

When the planks were finally scraped clean, the state of the hull was found to be so bad that far more rebuilding was needed than the owner had planned. He came to

Branscomb, a round little man not very different from his vessel, to protest and argue the matter with Nicholas.

"Cannot you go forward, and do only the work for which we had arranged?" suggested this Mr. Rufus Craythorpe, through whose fingers money passed with extreme reluctance.

"If she should put to sea with only such repairs, she would be safe neither for men nor for cargo," Nicholas insisted. "We cannot have part in any such inadequate refitting."

At this Mr. Craythorpe raised such a storm of protest, such an outcry that he was being betrayed by unfair means, that Nicholas' hardworn patience could scarcely stand steady.

"I will make you an offer, Mr. Craythorpe," he said at last. "I will buy the brig from you as she stands upon the cradles, and will refit her as my own undertaking." He knew that she had the makings of a good ship, although a very slow one; and he felt that it should be possible to sell her when she was ready once more for sea. Since there was no other work in view, he thought that the situation was desperate.

"But the money?" questioned Mr. Craythorpe. "Where will you get the money for buying her? All the world knows that you have no surplus and that your work here, since you lost your vessel, has merely been going on from hand to mouth. It is well known that you are no judge of the seaworthiness of a ship."

Nicholas flushed. He knew who had proclaimed abroad that news. "I will give you a mortgage on the shipyard," he said. Since he and his uncle had been freed of that former load of debt, he had vowed that they would never incur new ones; but, with the thought of bringing his work to an end and dismissing his men to the bitter poverty of winter, he felt that a moment had

come for drastic remedy. To his offer, however, Mr. Craythorpe shook his head.

"If you should not be able to pay me, and I am certain that you will not, would it be of any use for me to hold possession of an idle shipyard? And idle your place will be, that we are all certain,—idle and ruined before another year is out."

No round little man with a heart of flint should be allowed to see what Nicholas felt at that suggestion. For very defiance he could not go back.

"Then we will lay the debt upon the property of the Blackbird Inn," he persisted steadily.

Mr. Craythorpe brightened eagerly. "That would do very well, very well indeed," he agreed. "An excellent bit of property and well situated. When I once get it into my hands I will extend the buildings—"

"It is not yet yours," Nicholas interrupted him, "but only if I fail to pay my debt." Mr. Craythorpe's spirits seemed not in the least cast down by this idea. He evidently considered that his hold on the Blackbird Inn would never be loosened.

The matter had to be discussed with Thomas Drury, who was able now to take more part in his affairs, but who still looked upon Nicholas as the single active partner. He gave his consent, his opinion agreeing with that of Nicholas that work should go forward at all costs. The slow revival of colony-to-colony trading made it seem that good use could be found for the little brig *Betsey*. Mr. Craythorpe traveled back to his own town, smiling broadly, and obviously feeling that he had done a very shrewd day's work.

"A cantankerous job," Caleb Harmon called the task of putting the *Betsey* in order. But by slow patience it was finally brought to an end, although not before spring had passed into summer. When the meadow larks were

once more announcing that it was time for the oak timbers to come rolling down the muddy roads out of the north country, Ephraim Haverall sent word that the winter had been so stormy and snowbound that he had little to send this year.

Much later in the summer Nathan Stiles brought the message:

"If you are to lay a new keel before winter, Eph will put by his haying to get the oak out for you."

Nicholas received the offer in silence. What heart could he have for laying down a new vessel now? The fortunes of the Drurys were at their lowest ebb; and he was at the very end of his resources.

The brig was in the water, as seaworthy as a duck, but with no greater degree of beauty or speed than was possessed by that practical barnyard fowl. Nicholas had sent out word to various merchants stating that he wished to sell her. Nathan Stiles, along with his message from Ephraim, brought him a handful of letters which must probably contain answers which would decide the future of the plump *Betsey*. After the postrider was gone, he sat himself down in the inner countingroom to read them.

There are various methods of saying no,—some kindly, some unconsciously cruel, some deliberately insolent. By the time he had finished his letters, Nicholas had become familiar with them all. It was really true, it seemed, that no man cared to take his word for the seaworthiness of a ship. He sat beside the table, very quiet with all the place empty about him. As it had been on that February morning when he had seen the footsteps under the plum trees, it now appeared that he was friendless, desperate, and had no one to whom he might turn. What a long circle of hope and sorrow he had followed to return to the same place!

One letter, the last which he read, had offered a mere

crumb of compliance with his request. Mr. Craythorpe would not consider being again owner of the *Betsey* but he would charter her for a certain sum. He had chanced to make a purchase of oil from a whaling fleet and was minded to send a cargo of it to the Carolinas. The amount which he offered was the veriest pittance, determined, so Nicholas knew, by his knowledge of how hard pressed was her owner. He sat pondering the question of acceptance, thinking so deeply that he did not hear any approach down the long, outer room. Indeed, no matter how alert he had been, he might not have heard, for these footsteps made scarcely any sound. He looked up quickly, however, when the door creaked softly and the head of a man was thrust inside.

Only twice before, and then very briefly, had he actually seen the face of that man who was called Hezekiah Truman because it was not his name. He recognized at once, however, the half-bold, half-cowering expression, and had no doubt as to who his visitor might be. They stared at each other for a considerable space of time since Nicholas would not trouble himself to be the first to speak.

"Do you pass me your word not to call the watch, if I come in?" the newcomer finally inquired cautiously.

"I do," Nicholas agreed. "There was an occasion when you might have blown my head off with your blunderbuss, and your heart failed you. For that you shall enter." As the man stepped inside and closed the door he asked further, "Where is your long-legged comrade? Did he not dare to come?"

"Oh, it was not that. Tom Travers stops at nothing," Hezekiah responded. "He and—and my employer have had a little falling-out. They have never agreed as well as they should."

"So you come as before from Darius Corland, and not from Etienne Bardeau?" Nicholas asked.

The other laughed shamefacedly. "It is true that I have not always myself agreed with the man I serve, and that I owed gratitude to Mr. Bardeau which I once sought to repay. Yes, I come from the same man as before. I beg you, sir, to mention no names; it is verily not wise. Tom Travers taught me that, while we were still comrades."

Nicholas could not forbear smiling at his awkwardness. "Then you had better drop the name of Tom Travers from your talk," he suggested. "It is my belief that the fellow is as desperate a rascal as walks the earth, and no proper company for a careful man like you."

"So I thought, so I thought myself!" agreed Hezekiah eagerly, whereupon Nicholas laughed aloud.

The other, not in the least abashed, stated his errand.

"He who has sent me," he began, as though the words had been learned by heart, "refers to a certain paper which is in your possession, over which you may remember there has been some—some negotiation already." Nicholas nodded. "He bids me tell you that he is now prepared to purchase that letter from you, and is ready to offer you a good round sum which, at the present juncture, may not come amiss to you. I was to emphasize especially that matter of the amount. It is to be subject to discussion with you, and very generous in its size. But I do not know how to emphasize it more than simply to say it again, a good round sum."

"And how much of it were you to get, for your share in the arrangement?" Nicholas inquired.

Hezekiah shook his head and closed his lips firmly. He was not to be caught unawares and laughed at again. But since the boy beside the table said nothing more he finally said, "I was not to come away without an answer."

"I am very weary of the whole affair," Nicholas returned. It seemed impossible to take this insignificant

messenger seriously. "You had better tell Darius Corland that if he wishes to treat with me, he will have to come himself."

"Very good, very good, sir. I will tell him. All I wanted was to have an answer of some kind." And Hezekiah, doubtless very glad to get his errand safely performed, vanished through the door as noiselessly as he had come.

Nicholas gathered his papers together. He had spoken only in jest and now he dismissed the visitor from his mind. There were more vital things to demand his attention. He must get out the accounting for the brig *Betsey* and calculate how great the loss would be on her if he were to accept Mr. Craythorpe's mean offer. He fetched the papers from the locker in the wall, but before he turned back to the table, stopped to glance up at the drawing of the *Jocasta* which hung above the cupboard. He stood there, studying it long and carefully, every line, every detail of her design. Was there anything here which could have caused disaster, any fault or flaw in the workmanship of her building, anything in which he must blame himself for that heavy weight of tragedy which had settled down upon them all? He stood there for he knew not how long, slowly gathering comfort as his eyes traveled from the counter of her stern to the eagle figurehead under her bowsprit. Whatever he might doubt about himself, his courage, his wisdom, his worth in the world, this work of his mind and his hands he could not doubt. The *Jocasta* had not betrayed to their undoing those whom she had carried across the seas. Her disappearance was from some other cause. He was only drawn from his contemplation by the sound of the door's opening once more. It was Darius Corland who stood upon the threshold.

Not since that day at the Blackbird Inn, more than

two years before, had Nicholas held speech with this man. Once or twice he had seen him driving through the streets, and he had caught a distant glimpse of him on the day of the launching. He was startled now to see what changes had come about. That handsome, high-colored face looked drawn and flabby; the free stride with its hint of swagger had grown heavy and lagging. Very slowly and without speaking Mr. Corland walked across the room and sat down in the chair which Nicholas placed for him. The boy seated himself on the other side of the table and waited for his guest to say why he had come. The words spoken to Hezekiah had never been meant seriously; the last thing in the world which he had looked for was that Darius should actually appear.

They sat very still for a little, with only the sound of the washing tide breaking the quiet in the little room. The sunshine, reflected from the water outside, ran across the ceiling in shimmering ripples of brightness. At last Darius Corland spoke in a voice as changed and broken as was his whole aspect.

"Nicholas," he said, "I was your uncle's friend."

It was fairly pitiful to see the big overbearing man actually pleading. But there were memories to harden the boy's heart.

"He called you his friend once," he agreed, "but it is long since you ceased to make even a pretense of being that. When his fortunes began to fail, you were certainly his friend no more. No," he corrected himself, "it was even earlier than that. It was before the British came and scuttled our ships beyond the harbor. We owe that, I hear, to you."

Darius winced. "That is long past now," he declared. "The war is over. Is it not time to put old grudges away? And I will offer you anything—anything that you could wish if you will—will do as I desire."

"Can you give us back our good name, which you have toiled so long to take away?" the boy asked bitterly.

"Yes, even that," returned Darius with eagerness. "With me behind you instead of against you, there is every promise that you would go far."

"I should not greatly care to go far in your manner of going," observed Nicholas dryly. He was wondering how any one could ever have been in awe or fear of this man. Certainly he would never be so again.

Once more Darius bent himself to pleading. "Of what use will it be to you," he asked, "to ruin my standing among my fellow men, to cast me down from the place which I have managed to win?"

"I have not done that," Nicholas replied, "nor have I even threatened to do so."

"No," responded Darius Corland. "But every day that goes by, I live in wonder as to whether you will, and how soon. No man can endure long under such strain."

It was quite true that the two years of uneasy wonder, of never feeling safe, had broken him as twenty of ordinary life could not have done. In spite of himself, Nicholas felt pity for the man opposite, fallen from his high estate to the actual point of begging for mercy. He weighed within himself the question of giving back the letter. It was of no real value to him; he had no wish ever to make use of it. But Etienne Bardeau, on putting it into his hands, had declared expressly that it should not be delivered to its author, that whatever was its fate, it was not to be returned to him.

Until he should see Etienne again, and be absolved from that agreement, he could not, in justice, give up the paper. As these thoughts were passing in his mind, Darius Corland watched him with straining eyes, looking for hope or assent.

"I would give it to you," Nicholas began, and the

color leaped to the man's face, "but on account of a promise, I do not feel at liberty to do so." Darius had leaned forward in his chair but now he sank back again, with the black tempest of disappointment and rage gathering upon his heavy countenance. Nicholas went on. "It is possible that I can be freed from the pledge I gave. Perhaps some time within the year—"

"What lying and quibbling is this?" snarled the man opposite. "Do you think I can believe that? You are holding out for a greater reward, are you? You think to make me purchase my letter dear? Who are you to make terms? All the world knows how near you are to beggary. You should snatch at anything to save yourself. Tell me your price and have done."

His old commanding habit had been too much for him, and with rage and terror he had lapsed into it once more. Nicholas stood up, white-faced with his own anger, but managing still to speak quietly.

"You may be gone from here," he said. "There is nothing further that you can say. You have won everything you own by riding over the wills of others; this thing you cannot win."

Darius rose also and took a step toward him.

"Do you think you can take the letter from me by force?" Nicholas pursued. "I am the younger of us and the more alert; time and good living have not dealt kindly with you, Darius Corland. And you cannot rob me of it by other hands, for you can no longer even hire ruffians to do your bidding."

The last shrewd guess had gone home; for Darius reddened in helpless fury.

"We will see," he thundered, as he went to the door. "You think I am powerless? Ah, you shall see!"

He strode out, closing the door with an echoing slam that fairly shook the wooden walls. His heavy feet

went down the long room and were lost to hearing outside.

Almost before he was gone, Nicholas had taken up his pen to write acceptance to Mr. Craythorpe's offer of chartering the *Betsey*. In one respect Mr. Darius Corland had spoken something very like the truth. The Drurys were so near to beggary that they should snatch at—almost—anything to save themselves.

It happened that Mr. Rufus Craythorpe was in haste to get his cargo to market before winter began and, therefore, had the oil brought round by lighters while the *Betsey* was receiving certain final touches at the rigging dock. The heavy casks of spermaceti oil were being lifted, swung inboard, and stowed in the forehold, the after space being kept clear for goods to be picked up on the southward voyage. "If she is not ready to sail by the middle of September, I will cancel the agreement," threatened Mr. Craythorpe, who knew well that she would be, but enjoyed taking a domineering attitude now that he had at his disposal, by such a clever bargain, a really seaworthy ship. It was not patience, but merely weariness which brought Nicholas to answer so calmly.

"We will have all ready. The captain and the crew may come aboard on the fourteenth."

It was the evening of the twelfth of September that, after giving the *Betsey* a final inspection Nicholas pronounced her preparation complete. Old John Ewing, for whom there had been no shipwright's work lately, was put in charge of her as watchman. Having seen that all was in order, Nicholas bade him good night and trudged away through gusty darkness to the inn. It had been a hot, damp day with a cloudy sky and occasional brief squalls of rain. Yet Phoebe had declared her certainty that it would "clear by morning."

"We have had rather less of sunshine and more of

lowering weather than was our due these last seasons," Nicholas had heard her saying to Dolly. "But it is my belief that now we are to have fair skies once more."

As Nicholas went homeward, he looked up at the starless blackness overhead, listened to the intermittent sighing of the wind, and made sure that Phoebe's prophecy was for once mistaken. He was done with the *Betsey*, and what a long task it had been to make the worn-out little tub into a stanch, safe vessel. Now that it was ended he felt suddenly that he was very tired. He did not know that he had begun to look more gaunt and haggard even than had his uncle, during the last strain of effort before illness came. He had not noted that people were glancing at him anxiously, that Dolly and Phoebe whispered about him when he was not looking. He was only conscious of how good it was to feel that he was done with the *Betsey* at last and could stumble upstairs to bed.

He slept heavily and awoke, realizing that the loud disturbance which had aroused him, the pounding upon his door, must have been going on for some minutes. He sat up in the darkness blinking, then tumbled headlong out of his bed and into his clothes. Of the words which Caleb Harmon was shouting, only a portion had really reached his sleepy mind but they were sufficient.

"Fire—on the wharves!"

As he ran down the street and saw the dull, red reflection on the sky turn to flaming reality beyond the shipyards, he knew at a single glance what was amiss. Nothing but burning oil could make those long banners of crimson and orange which streamed before the rising wind. As he came beyond the buildings he saw the *Betsey*, her bow and forecastle wrapped in a garment of flame, spouting black smoke and fire from the forward hatches. She was tugging at the cables which held her, for the gusty breezes of the earlier evening had risen now to a stiff north wind.

Even before he reached the wharf, people had come pouring out of the little houses which crowded down to the shore so close beyond the Drury docks. They were attempting to fling water upon the blaze, but the whole fore portion of the ship was a seething furnace which it was almost impossible to approach.

"The fire just burst out of her, all of a sudden, as she might be a volcano," John Ewing was trying to cry in Nicholas' ear. At the moment he paid little heed, since checking the spread of the blaze was more important than its origin.

Such water as could be thrown upon her planking disappeared instantly in a hiss and a puff of steam. If it reached the oil-fed conflagration within, it only served to spread the flame. There was no more hope of the fire's sparing the *Betsey* than if she were made of paper.

"We had best try to save the houses," Caleb Harmon said at Nicholas' elbow. The high wind was carrying long gusts of flame and bits of burning rope and canvas, to lodge them upon the clustering roofs not many yards away. If fire once gained foothold in the close-built little village, who could tell what wholesale destruction would sweep over it before morning. Even as Nicholas looked, a slope of old shingles on the nearest cottage burst into a blaze but was quenched by the owner with a splash of water.

Nicholas nodded. For the *Betsey* there was nothing to be done. With hasty orders he got the men in line to pass buckets up from the harbor edge and empty them first upon the nearest roofs, then, when these were saturated, to move a little farther. But as they toiled, the little brig lying doomed at the dock suddenly changed to a vindictive demon, sending forth ever-renewed blasts of fire which threatened minute by minute to render all their effort vain.

"We should cut her hawsers and let her drift down the

harbor," Nicholas cried in Caleb's ear, for the roar of the flames almost drowned their voices.

Caleb nodded. "The tide will carry her out, in spite of the wind," he shouted back. "She should drift clear of the waterside and run ashore on Branscomb Head. There's nothing else will save the town."

The two seized axes and fell to chopping with all their might. The oil had been stored in the fore hold so that, so far, only half the ship was on fire. She had not been anchored, but was moored to the wharf by four big hawsers of which the bow cable was already almost burned through. One, two, they snapped under the blows of the axes and the strain of the plunging *Betsey*. Nicholas and Caleb attacked the stern cable, so that the line amidships should hold her steady until the last. But the strain upon it was too heavy; it parted with a crack like a pistol shot, leaving the stern cable holding her so that she swung about in the wind, heading straight down upon the threatened warehouses, sheds, and crowded cottages directly to leeward.

The tide was pulling her seaward but, held as she was, the wind was having its desperate way. Caleb Harmon had dropped his axe with a groan of helpless dismay which rose suddenly to a cry of agonized remonstrance. Nicholas had wielded his blade with a last frantic stroke, and as the line parted, he jumped across the intervening space, caught the *Betsey's* helm, and attempted to bring the bow of the drifting ship around to face the harbor mouth. The strong hand of the tide seized her and gave her greater and greater steerage way; she rounded out into the channel as though she were under sail, and went sweeping down the harbor, a vivid, streaming torch of destruction.

Nicholas, in sole charge of his strange craft, stood at the tiller, easing and guiding her so that she would follow

exactly the deepest channel. He was willing to run no risk of getting aground while the *Betsey* was still within such distance of the scattered houses along the shore that a leap of wind-carried fire might drop blazing sparks upon the roofs. He could see the cottages, strung out beside the water, showing clear in the wild, crimson flare of their passing. The breeze was steady and flew the long flames out to starboard. Had they eddied fore and aft, his position on the after deck would have been impossible to hold.

He knew every rock and shoal of that harbor where he had swum and fished and sailed since he was seven years old. The tumult of excitement which had possessed him had grown now so tense that it had brought him into a curious state of calm. Overwrought as he was, his hands were steady and his head was clear; he felt that his strength would compass any conceivable purpose; it seemed as though he were standing upon the clouds. He noted how sharply outlined and unreal the houses looked, lit by the weird light as they flashed by, how unnatural were the white, strained faces of the people who ran down to the water to watch them pass. He thought that he heard faint sounds of voices calling to him, but nothing was really audible but the roar of the flames.

"When the fire reaches the mainmast," he told himself, "it will be time for me to go overboard."

They had swept beyond the last of the village now, and the jagged black line of rocks against the sky showed that they were drifting parallel with Branscomb Head. The flames had seemed, for a little, to be gaining small headway; he did not realize that they had been creeping aft below, rather than along the windswept deck. Nicholas was looking upward, watching a curl of fire creep up the foremast when, with a sudden bellowing blast, a great column of flame shot up through the hatch just before

him. Its glare blinded him, the rush of hot air almost stunned him, but he had strength and clearness of purpose still to swing the tiller and head the *Betsey* straight toward the rock-ribbed shore. A lick of flame reached out, seared the skin of his arm and set fire to his sleeve, just as he set his foot upon the port rail and leaped as far outward as he could into the black water.

It seemed strange to be dropped all at once into the quiet darkness, after the blinding and deafening uproar upon the brig. He struck out with long easy strokes, quite comfortable and happy among the warm swells, although the salt water stung a little where it touched his burned arm. He rose to a wave just in time to see the *Betsey* strike with a shattering crash, sending up a geyser of sparks and a mast-high pillar of flame. A moment later there was an explosion in her hold, echoing all along the wall of rock, casting upward a shower of bits of burning wood which dropped hissing about him as he lay in the water. The tide was beginning to drift him seaward; he must put forth all his effort if he were to reach shore.

It was a longer pull than he had thought, and a fiercer battle against the force of the tide. He could feel that the current was growing stronger and was setting inshore. This, he knew, was bearing him to greater danger, for he had reached the point where the tide race swept northward past the very outermost rock of Branscomb Head. If he failed to make land now, he would be carried out to sea.

His breath was coming short, as a swimmer's does who is near the end of his power. He struggled and fought on, rose to see a mass of rock close before him, sank into a hollow to believe that he had drifted by it, and rose again to catch at a jutting ledge that was seaweed-covered and cut his hands. The tide jerked and snatched at him as he clung desperately; another wave lifted him

higher, and he snatched at a better hold; the third raised him bodily, so that he crawled out upon the firm surface under its slimy, wet cushion. He lay full length, panting to fill his empty lungs. Loud in his ears was the sound of the fast-sweeping current plunging through the last scattered boulders at the extremity of Branscomb Head.

He lay inert for a long time, too much exhausted to think of anything beyond breath and rest. At last, however, he sat up. Far away, it seemed, was the dull glare of the *Betsey* burning quietly now, like a spent bonfire. Overhead was a black sky growing gray to the morning; all about him were black rocks and black, lapping water. He and the brig might have been the only two in the whole universe.

He sat quietly, his arms about his knees, watching the daylight come across the sea. The high wind of the night had torn the clouds asunder; but they still hung everywhere save above the horizon to the eastward. Nicholas thought that he had never seen such brilliant beauty as showed in that stretch of dawn-illuminated sky. As Phoebe had said, the weather was clearing at last. Below the edge of the dark curtain the awakening light was like green, transparent glass, reflected in a widening band of smooth water, where calm had fallen.

The nearest clouds were driving swiftly above him. A brisk morning breeze was sweeping the sky clean of them. It passed over his head and then dropped to that complete hush which only early morning knows. The eternal restlessness of the sea lapped in ripples at his feet, while its faint movement ran in watered patterns all over the vast, silvery expanse before him. There were left smooth patches here and there, like irregular bits of broken looking glass.

Out toward that eastward rim of the silent world the *Jocasta* had taken her way. Those smiling waters knew

the secret of where she had gone, yet would never tell him. That clear sky had seen her pass and whither, yet would guard the mystery forever.

"Oh, Michael, Michael!" he cried aloud. There was no one now to see or hear him; he could let pain master him at last. Again and again he cried out the name of his vanished friend. "Michael, Michael!"

The tempest of anguish that swept over him lasted not many minutes and presently was gone. That serene clearing sky, that majestic greatness of the vast waters before him, held some message of steadying comfort. The sea stretched from him to Michael, to the *Jocasta*, whithersoever they had fared. Though they should never come back, he could still stand beside that shining water and be near them.

The morning light had brightened so that now the whole world about him was visible. He turned about to look back toward the town. The rough-hewn outline of Branscomb Head stood stark against the sky; by a curve in its rugged length, part of the harbor was hidden so that he saw only a portion of its glassy surface, a single corner of the crowd of houses clustering at the edge of the glassy water. Beyond he could see the softly rising hills, marked with squares of yellowing fields in different shades where oats, hay, or buckwheat had grown. The folds of the slope held close growing woods; toward the summits were stretches of bare pasture ground, streaked by the outcropping of rock ledges with here and there a solitary maple, oak or pine. The flitting shadow of the last cloud in the sky passed over them and was gone. It looked in that brilliant morning light like a world new-made. Nicholas seemed to regard it with eyes that had never really seen clearly before. This was home, this was his land; the love he had for it was so much a part of him as to partake of his whole being, bone and sinew as well as

heart. His ship—his friend—what he felt for them was not like this. To that brief stretch of fields, hills and houses, to the greater things for which it stood, he must forever give the best he had. Sorrow shrank into a little place alongside that greater knowledge. Whatever came to him, or failed to come, he must carry an intrepid heart to meet what was still before him.

The tide had turned and was now running in past the headland. He slipped off the rock into the water, and drew himself, with long strokes, to the shore. Dripping, he climbed out upon a granite ledge and scrambled to the summit of the headland. Once he looked back over his shoulder to see that the red ball of the sun was lifting above the water; then he set forth upon his journey homeward, turning his face to the work which was still waiting.





CHAPTER VIII

SILVER TRUMPETS

If Nicholas' eyes could have pierced that mystery which lay hidden beyond the horizon, he would have seen the *Jocasta* in the first portion of her voyage faring prosperously southward. The heavy winds of autumn bore her swiftly; so that she reached Charleston even before the appointed day. While the waiting cargo was being loaded, Michael made a hasty, mud-splashed journey to his brother's house on the plantation which had so long been home.

The delighted, grinning Negroes came crowding about to welcome him; his old mammy wept with the pleasure of seeing "young Mars'er" in his own place again; then wept once more at hearing that it was only for a day.

"I don't hold noways with dese yeah ships," she lamented. "Nobody never came to no good by triffin' around water."

Michael's brother greeted him whole-heartedly; and the two sat that evening in the big parlor, each in his accustomed seat, and talked of cotton, of how Clayton Hawkins had done well with a new process for curing tobacco, and how big Jason, the best field hand, had been

hurt by a viciously kicking mule. The conversation ran out finally, and the two sat without speaking for a long time until the older brother burst out with a paraphrase of Mammy Sophy's words.

"I don't like this seafaring business, Michael. It isn't the thing that our people do. You are not even captain of your ship."

"A man doesn't take command of a vessel in his first voyage or two, even if he is a Slade of Berkeley County," returned Michael cheerily. He went on in more serious tone, "I can see what important work there is for such men as you, how great your share is in helping to build up the country. Yet what work is there here for me? A plantation has one head and a hundred or so pairs of hands. I am not the head, and I cannot be the hands. I have had to find out some work for myself that will make me feel that I am part of the great things that are going forward in our time."

His brother shook his head with less disapproval than before, but still with no very great comprehension. "You always were a fellow for picking up strange ideas, Michael, but I suppose you must go your own way. I'll own that it is a good thing for me to have my cotton and tobacco go to market at last, even if it has to be in a Yankee-owned vessel."

Early next morning Michael set off again, with some tuggings at his heart for the place where he had spent such a happy boyhood; but with even greater impulse to be pressing on toward the success of his new venture.

"I wish Nicholas could see all this," he thought, as he rode under the live oaks and the autumn-colored eucalyptus trees, and galloped along the turnpike toward Charleston.

In company with Etienne Bardeau he had visited the West Indies more than once; so that the Windward and

the Leeward Islands, the harbors of Jamaica and Port au Prince were as familiar to him as Pimlico Sound and the Virginia Capes. Since the English Lords of Government were still displeased with those colonies which had come of age and entered upon life for themselves, they had forbidden American ships to trade, save under iron-bound restrictions, with the British West India Islands. It was to French, Spanish, and Dutch ports that the *Jocasta* must lay her course; so that she presently dropped anchor in a broad bay with rugged mountains behind it, and Michael sat down to write to Nicholas that they were safely arrived at Port au Prince.

Even before he was ready to go ashore, Michael was sought out by an old acquaintance, Monsieur Raoul La Rocque, the most careful, thrifty and successful merchant in the French Islands. He was carried out to the *Jocasta* by a boat's crew of polished ebony rowers, and was brought into the cabin for a talk upon trading matters and other things. During his year on the *Deux Frères*, Michael had learned to speak French easily. Captain Douglas understood it less well and sat following the conversation, but joining in it but little. Their first words were of Etienne Bardeau, through whom the merchant and Michael had originally met.

"A bold man with dangerous ideas," commented the little, quick-eyed Frenchman, sipping slowly and carefully the glass of wine which had been set before him. "But Etienne is one who strangely holds a friend's heart, none the less."

"Perhaps France, and the world also, has need of dangerous ideas at certain times," Michael suggested.

Monsieur La Rocque replied with an exclamation of horror, yet with a smile breaking through it.

"Do not lead me away into discussion of the strange new thoughts which go winging all over the world in

these uneasy days," he said. "Let me see your cargo lists that I may help you to the best disposal of your goods. I fear you have come at a difficult time, but we will do all that we can."

All men who have to do with trade, especially commerce by ships, learn early that market conditions are as fitful and variable as the breezes upon which sea-borne traffic must depend. Sometimes there will be great demand for some single commodity of which there is no large supply; then, in the course of brief time, the lack will be filled up and the price will have fallen almost to the ground. A man setting forth with a cargo-laden ship had need for all his wits in disposing of his goods, in deciding where to sell them, what to buy in exchange and whither to carry the new lading so that the long, profitless miles of sailing from north to south, or from east to west should be crowned with final reward. It was always the faculty of the American traders, if they did not find profit in one port, to seek it in another.

Monsieur La Rocque made clear to the two Americans how matters stood in the Island markets. Their salt meat and fish, their shoes, hides, candles, and cheese would sell to fairly good advantage. "I myself will take so and so much," he declared. "Monsieur Jerome of Port au Prince and Basse Terre will want so much more." This person or that, so he laid out, would take the most of their coarser goods. The offer was fairly good, better, so Michael knew, than any bargains which his inexperience could have made alone. And the rice and cotton would, so they were told, fetch quite amazing prices.

"Bales of woolen cloth, red, blue and gray," Monsieur La Rocque read and shook his head. "Ah, no, no, what use can they be in the Islands? Those you will have to carry farther. But you have already chance of great return by selling practically your whole cargo here."

It happened, as he made plain to them, that just those products of which the Islands were usually full were this season almost entirely lacking, on account of a year of bad harvests. French ships which had come out to purchase cotton, sugar and rice were on the point of going home in ballast rather than pay the ruinous prices which such commodities were bringing.

"I know a captain from Bordeaux who will clasp you in impassioned embrace if you offer to sell him your cotton and indigo," declared little Monsieur La Rocque. "What he will offer you should yield you greater profit than you could ever get by carrying it to France yourselves."

Captain Douglas nodded over this information. "We can forego the pleasure of the embraces, if he has solid gold or silver to buy with," he observed.

At the end of the list the Frenchman looked puzzled over the final item. "Fine linens? Those are goods which I have never seen one of your vessels bring to us before."

Michael went to fetch one of the rolls of fair white weaving entrusted to his care by the maidens of Branscomb. Monsieur La Rocque's eyes fairly glistened as he ran his slim fingers over the perfect surface.

"There are certain great ladies of these Islands, French and Spanish, sighing for the luxuries of their own land, who will lay eager hands upon such beautiful stuffs as these. No dark fingers of bondswomen ever wove such webs," he declared solemnly. "My dear friend, were it not for my regard for you and Etienne, the merchant in me would swallow up the man, and I would take all that you have of this for a sum which you would call generous, but which would actually be only the half of what it is worth. I will, however, yield to no such temptation, and will call in some others, for whom I have high regard, to share in this great opportunity. We will decide amongst

us what is the just price to offer you. Ah, how the smugglers will be fighting for these bales, a little later, to carry them into the British Islands. Here lies, by far, the most valuable portion of your cargo."

The conversation moved on to other matters; and Captain Douglas, who professed no knowledge at all of trading affairs, joined in the exchange of those miscellaneous items of news which ships and sailors carry from port to port.

The whole talk amongst the Islands at present, the seafaring gossip which seems to travel more swiftly than a ship can sail, was of a certain vessel of New England, whose owners, so the Frenchman declared frankly, must be entirely out of their wits, and whose captain must be a most sadly misguided fellow. Michael had heard, indeed, certain reports, before he sailed, of this ship, the *Columbia* of Boston, owned by a group of wealthy merchants and sent out upon a venture and to a destination only rather vaguely defined. Here amid the teeming commerce of the West Indies, however, news of her errand had been seized upon with the liveliest interest, and talk of her voyage, with speculations as to its results, had become almost the sole topic of sailors' and merchants' conversation. She with her consort, the sloop *Lady Washington*, had touched at Port au Prince a month or two before and had from there headed southwestward with the avowed purpose of rounding the Horn, and following the long west coast of the whole American continent. She proposed to trade for furs with the Indians in some vague region, "in the neighborhood of the world's end," so the Frenchman expressed it. These furs she was to carry to China, to exchange them for Eastern goods, silks, spices and tea, which she would carry home by the Cape of Good Hope.

"Mad, mad; the whole scheme is of lunatics," was

Monsieur La Rocque's summing up of the entire scheme. "Cannot a ship's company be content with a properly laid down voyage to and from some familiar port, instead of roving and questing all about the earth, to come home empty-handed at last or never to return at all? Why their cruise will carry them over the circuit of the whole earth!"

Captain Douglas, who had been following the conversation rather heavily and slowly, suddenly brought down his hand with a great blow upon the table.

"Clean around the world!" he cried. "Now that is a real voyage, worthy of a fine ship."

There was a gleam in his eyes which Michael had never seen there before. He had considered his commanding officer somewhat deliberate and stolid, and had found him so saving of speech that they had exchanged only the smallest number of views on any subject. He began to realize, all at once, that here was one whom it took long to know, and who had greater depth of thought and feeling than he would ever show, save unawares.

The small Frenchman was still voicing words of disapproval over the rash undertaking of the *Columbia*. "Such foolhardiness belongs to a young country and untried sailors. Old seamen would know better. No good will come of such wild adventuring."

Captain Douglas listened without immediate comment and, when he spoke at last, seemed to bring the words from the very depths of his heart.

"I have often desired a certain thing," he finally declared. His curious, slow, but deeply glowing enthusiasm was visibly waxing greater, and little by little was changing entirely his square, sober face. "I have often wished that I could have lived a few hundred years ago, in the Age of Discovery, at the moment when, so it must have seemed to the eyes of all in that crowded, jostling, war-seething Europe of yours, as though a fog had sud-

denly lifted, showing them vast new continents spread out, all clear and shining in the light of brilliant opportunity."

He looked across at Michael whose kindling glance matched his. But little Monsieur La Rocque rose suddenly from his chair. "What talk we have drifted into, we who sat down to speak of beef and candles!" he cried, and turning very abruptly upon Captain Douglas he admonished sternly, "You are of sufficient age to know better; do not lead this young man's thoughts astray."

Whereupon he made his farewells and was gone.

Michael, returning from the deck where he had witnessed their friend's departure, found Captain Douglas sitting in the same place with the same far gleam in his eyes. He looked up at the boy as he stood for a moment in the door. Each seemed to read the other's thought.

"Michael," cried the captain, in a tone almost of alarm, "do not permit your mind to run upon such matters. Let us, as that wiser Frenchman said, let us not lead each other astray!"

Never before had he spoken to his junior save as Mr. Slade and with the utmost of shipboard ceremony. Michael grinned as no subordinate should smile at his captain.

"We will do nothing without due thought," he said. "There is no need to decide at just this day or hour. But—at what season is the weather best for doubling Cape Horn?"

"At—almost this season," Captain Douglas muttered unwillingly. "It is summer below the tropics now, and in two months or more from this time—"

He dropped into silent dreaming, then suddenly roused himself. "We have nothing with which to trade with Indians. We have no notion what it is they desire."

"I chance to know a little of Indians," Michael returned, "of the Seminoles, far removed from those dwellers

in the North West, but still of the same race. Even they have told me that, in certain matters, all red men are alike. They are much like children, yet children who must support and defend themselves in the world. To remember that is to understand how to trade with them. As it chances, we are in the way of disposing of our whole cargo in the first port, all but certain bales of blue and red cloth, and the savage has a pleasant eye for gay colors."

With a certain fierceness, Captain Douglas answered him, "And can we voyage, nobody knows just how many thousand northward miles, with a few rolls of colored linsey-woolsey as cargo?"

"No, but we can purchase other goods. We can weigh the matter," cried Michael joyously; and went still laughing out upon the deck.

There followed some days of bargaining, arranging and putting goods ashore. Monsieur Raoul La Rocque was as good as his word, and brought others of his calling to buy what he himself could not use. Not even the hardest and most experienced of them was able to keep his face quite unmoved when the webs of linen were brought out. More than one—after the bargain had been concluded—declared that such a purchase was the opportunity of a lifetime.

Several of them had smaller establishments at other and less important islands, and stipulated that the *Jocasta* should carry thither the portion of her cargo which they bought, and should land the goods at such little ports as Basse Terre, Marie Galante, and Fort de France. This Captain Douglas and Michael readily agreed to do, since there seemed, as yet, no prospect of their taking on a new cargo. A goodly number of Spanish silver dollars, stowed away in stout kegs like herrings, had been realized from the sale of the northern wares. But over the prevailing ruinous prices of the commodities they had meant to buy, they

were still debating and had, so far, purchased nothing. Of the *Columbia* and her voyage those two said nothing to each other—directly. Yet one evening as they stood on deck together, Michael suddenly burst out.

“I think that there are no names out of the past that ring with such poetry as those of the great explorers, De Gama, Cabral, Magellan.”

Captain Douglas took him up at once. “Frobisher and Drake,” he added to the list, “and earlier yet, those Vikings, with open boats and rows of oars, with a steer-board at the side instead of a rudder, and no bearings to follow, only the chance gleam of a star!”

They did not enlarge upon the conversation; for Captain Douglas walked hastily away as though he were afraid of what his impetuous, red-haired junior officer was leading him into saying.

Hardly more than seven days after casting anchor in the harbor of Port au Prince, they cleared again for Basse Terre, feeling their way with care out along the reef-fringed Cape Dame Marie. It was a still tropic evening, hot and almost breathless, but with a vaguely uneasy sea. With slow caution the *Jocasta* came finally free of land and made ready to swing into the open reaches of the Spanish Main.

Timothy Tripp, at the end of his lookout watch aloft, came scrambling down to seek Michael.

“There is something you should not miss, sir,” he declared. “But make haste before the light fails.”

Michael clambered aloft behind him, not with the monkey-like agility for which Timothy Tripp was famous, but with sufficient speed to mark him as a seasoned sailor. Once upon the cross-trees and following the direction which Tripp indicated across the uneasy water, he caught sight of the two vessels which the little brown sailor man had so greatly desired that he should see.

The most distant was a small lugger, dingy of paint and of canvas, but evidently, from the speed with which she cut the long easy swells, a keen sailor. She had only just slipped out from the shelter of the long tongue of land which was the last far-reaching finger of the rock-knuckled Island of Haiti, which among many still went by its old Spanish name of Hispaniola. She had put off from the French portion of the island, although she had probably not loaded her cargo at Port au Prince, but had taken it aboard in some small, hidden harbor on the south coast, and, with intent to make use of the covering darkness, had cleared just before sunset and was standing away for Jamaica.

"She is a smuggler," declared Timothy Tripp gleefully; "every line of her would tell a man that. And she must be an old offender, for the cutter has taken after her without a word of summons or a signal to heave to."

The larger vessel, a stout cutter of British build and rig, was plainly one of those ships of the Royal Navy whose duty it was to patrol the coasts of the British Islands and see that contraband goods were not landed anywhere in the multitudes of lonely, rocky harbors which Nature seemed to have designed for the special convenience of "the free trade."

"King George keeps his men busy," commented Tripp, "with all his orders that French and Spanish and, most of all, American ships must not land goods in his ports. They say the poor black folk on the British Islands are fair starving for the food the Yankee vessels used to bring them. There's a few of them at least will eat their fill to-morrow; for I doubt not it's part of our own cargo that's sailing away yonder to Jamaica. The lugger is loaded heavy, but the king's cutter is not going to catch her."

As the smuggler's boat came clear of the last reef,

she caught full what breeze there was, and ran straight before it, since it carried her directly upon her way. The cutter, which had veered so close to the French shore, evidently with certain knowledge that forbidden goods were on their way to Jamaica that night, now fell into the lugger's wake and settled down to a straight contest of speed. One sail after another went up on the British boat to catch any faint breath of breeze which might waft her the more quickly. Michael had never dreamed that one small vessel could carry such a cloud of canvas, such a multitude of unfamiliar sails.

"That's her water boom that she is running out," Tripp told him as she spread an extra spinnaker-like wing in addition to the ordinary expanse of canvas set for running before the wind. "And they call that an angel's wing," he told Michael further, as an oddly shaped topsail appeared above the others, where it scarcely seemed there were space for another inch of bellying canvas. The last light of blue and pink and amethyst touched the wide-winged vessel as she drew away upon her determined race. The lugger had also put out an expanse of canvas whose different sails Michael could scarcely distinguish, and of which he would hardly have known the names. Smuggling from island to island, in light tropic airs, or in ruthless tropic hurricanes, was an art unto itself of which he had little knowledge.

"Do you think the Englishman is not going to overtake her?" he said to Tripp.

The small sailor hanging upon the yard was watching in an ecstasy of delight the closely contended race. "Each one is just as good a sailor as the other, and has as good a skipper," he answered. "Do you mark how each one edges and veers so that not a single sigh of this lazy wind shall escape her? They will race clear to Jamaica with just that space between them; but when they

get off the island, the little one will find some way to give the big one the slip in the dark."

It seemed the most possible thing in the world that the lugger was in truth carrying their own goods away to British ports where American ships were not allowed to trade. Her hold was probably crammed full of the barrels of salt fish and sides of bacon from New England. And had not Monsieur Raoul La Rocque said quite openly, when he bought their linens, that English households amongst the islands, as well as French and Spanish, would have the final use of them? Even now those carefully wrapped bales were almost certainly stowed away below her deck, guarded by hairy men with gold rings in their ears, with knives and pistols, first cousins to those buccaneers who used to call the Spanish Main their own.

How little could any of the sheltered maidens of Branscomb have thought of the bold voyages which their wares would make! It was not so out of place to think of daring little Dolly Drury's possessions being carried on this romantic chase. After all, Dolly had been wholly right about the value of the feminine contribution to the cargo, right in that accidentally sagacious way with which women sometimes guess correctly about things of which they know nothing. Dolly would love to be watching that race and to understand that the work of her hands was the prize. But Michael thought of Henrietta Sparrow, thin, sour-faced and precise, sitting in her bare, tidy, New England kitchen, spinning and weaving, spinning and weaving like some meager, indefatigable spider. Perhaps it was her long-hoarded wealth which was flying now over those smoothly rolling waters, whose prismatic colors were like the inside of an oyster shell. Here were men risking their lives in romantic and desperate adventure of which her narrow soul could never have

dreamed. Some similar thought evidently was filling the captive heart of Timothy Tripp.

"Seventeen years," he said reflectively, "seventeen years she has put me by, to get ready for her marriage day. And it is most likely that yonder goes the whole of what she has gathered, all of what she has made me wait for through this whole enduring time. I hope the boat goes on the rocks," he pursued vindictively, "and the whole treasure sinks to the bottom, and the mermaids deck themselves out with those everlasting fathoms of white which she was always weaving." He heaved the great sigh of a loyal but long-tried lover. "Ships and winds and waves, they all have strange ways of their own, but a man may know them by heart and backwards before he begins to understand a woman."

"But she is going to marry you at the end of the voyage," Michael insisted. "Suppose the voyage were to be a very far one, such as we had not dreamed that we might undertake?"

All the wrinkles in Timothy Tripp's brown face puckered up in a smile of delight. "A far voyage?" he repeated. "Ah, that would be worthy of the *Jocasta* indeed! I have stopped so long ashore in these last months that I am ready now to sail the whole world round."

"But Henrietta," Michael reminded him; "how will it be to keep Henrietta waiting so long?"

Timothy's smile did not vanish, but broadened wickedly. "It will do Henrietta no harm to wait a little," he remarked, "after all the years she has kept me double-reefed lover."

The quick darkness of nightfall in the tropics was threatening soon to hide that contest of speed which they were watching. The wind freshened in a sudden gust, before which both the hunter and the hunted dipped dangerously; but neither of them would shorten sail. The long

swells over which the *Jocasta* was moving so easily began to be agitated into a restless, choppy sea. Timothy Tripp, looking across at the darkening horizon, said:

"It is past the season for hurricanes, but it is my belief there is something very like one coming, out of its turn, to speed those two even faster on their way. I wonder which will take in her canvas first."

"Look," cried Michael, pointing suddenly.

A dark, flitting shape had crossed the wake of the first of the racing vessels. It was still light enough to make out the low black hull and the single long pointed sail. It was a piragua, the native boat used by the Carib Indians. Michael had seen them many times gliding in and out of the harbors or slipping from island to island, and knew that their bold, cinnamon-colored sailors often ventured upon perilous voyages in them, even to the mainland of Mexico and Central America. They were made from a single, roughly hewn, dug-out log, split in two with a flat bottom of heavy planking to give greater beam and with a rude leeboard thrust over the side to prevent their capsizing when the lateen sail filled with wind.

The small craft which he was watching now was beating into the wind, and seemed as determined to keep upon her course as was the flying cutter which was bearing down upon her. The three vessels each had its own urgent errand, from which apparently not one of them would give way.

"The Englishman will never alter her course a point to spare a Carib water bug," remarked Tripp, straining his eyes in the swiftly gathering gloom. "There, he is upon her; will they win clear? No, they have struck."

For a moment the little Indian vessel was hidden from sight under the bows of the cutter. Then she crawled into view once more, staggering in the rising wind, plainly disabled and unable to hold her course. The

British vessel sped steadily upon its own way. The wind had swooped down upon it. Very reluctantly, so it seemed, that last sail, the angel's wing, was being furled. Michael slid from his place and went clambering downward. Every brace and block of the *Jocasta's* rigging was singing and creaking, and the place for the second officer was at his proper station on the deck below.

The wind had fallen upon them so suddenly that for a little there was no time for thought of anything but the rapid furling of the sails. The *Jocasta*, instead of her stately rising and dipping, was now bucking and rolling, with great splashes of spray rattling down upon her deck, as she sped forward under close-reefed canvas. Timothy Tripp had found Michael's side after comparative quiet had replaced the tumult of orders and the sound of running feet.

"Yonder is the Indian," he said, pointing over the leeward rail. "See how low in the water they lie. The boat is certain to founder before she can make land. 'Tis a pity to see bold sailors go down, no matter what sort of craft they navigate."

Michael caught one glimpse of the native boat being flung up and down in the heavy seas as helplessly as though she were a winged duck. He swung about and ran to where Captain Douglas stood beside the wheel.

"Lower a boat?" the Captain exclaimed, in response to his breathless request. "That is a perilous thing in this rising tempest. You will have to ask for volunteers."

The words were not out of his mouth before there were voices at Michael's elbow.

"I am here," announced Timothy Tripp and ten other men at the same moment.

The rescue party from the *Jocasta* pulled across the steadily mounting waves, until the longboat came so close as to be tossing on the crest of one wave while the heavy

piragua lurched and staggered over the summit of the next. Michael shouted across the intervening space and made signs to the two brown navigators that they were to make ready to jump aboard the longboat the moment she came alongside of them. For answer one of the Indians swung their vessel about as though in panic-stricken effort to escape, while the other, leaning over the broken side where the cutter had crushed in the whole length of the gunwhale, shouted in return a few Indian words whose evident message was rage and defiance.

"Does the fellow take us for pirates?" exclaimed the seaman who pulled the oar nearest to Michael's place. "You would think his vessel was laden with gold, she lies so heavy in the water, and her crew seem so shy of letting us come nigh her. Ah, will you see that!"

The Caribs' rotten sail had carried away and was now whipping in a fringe of tattered rags from the single spar, while the boat slid into the trough of the wave and wallowed, helpless. One of the men, overcome by terror, was cowering in her bottom; but the other, still undaunted, perched upon her pitching stern and tried by means of the clumsy tiller to bring her back into her course again.

"Now, give way," Michael ordered, and the longboat dropped down the heaving slope and lay alongside the piragua. The sterns of the two small vessels swung almost together; and the Carib Indian, suddenly rising in his place, seized the heavy paddle and struck at Michael with determined and terrific force.

Had not the sailor next him jerked up his oar at the same instant, Michael might have been brained where he sat. As it was, the swing of the long blade not only parried the blow but swept the Carib from his place, so that he plunged overboard into the tossing sea.

"Let the fellow drown," roared the seaman. "Why seek to save such a pair of murderous, brown devils as these?"

But Michael's obstinacy was completely aroused. They had set out to rescue these two who had made so bold and skillful a battle for life, and rescued they should be. The head of the Indian overboard now showed round and black in the water astern. Timothy Tripp, in the bow, had flung a grappling hook, which had caught in the forward thwarts of the piragua and had swung the vessel round, a helpless tow. A lashing rain had begun to fall, drenching and blinding them, as they tried to peer into the gloom.

"The fellow took the paddle with him and is still clinging to it," shouted Tripp, as their bow spun round and passed within a boat's length of the man in the water. The stern swung nearer to him, so that Michael, reaching far over, actually laid hand upon the paddle by which the man was floating. With the grip of iron fingers, the Indian caught his arm and tore loose his rescuer's grasp, just as a great heaving wave swept him past into the darkness. He had relinquished his hold upon the paddle, which now floated idly in the wake of the longboat.

"His comrade has him," cried one of the oarsmen suddenly. The heavy dugout, jerking dead weight behind the *Jocasta's* longboat, had swept to the same course over the crest of the wave, and the remaining Indian, leaning far over her stern had snatched at his struggling comrade as he went whirling by. They could see his slow effort to drag on board the half-unconscious man.

"I believe he is safe," declared the seaman beside Michael. "And now it's as though we had hooked two live sharks on the end of a line, and had nothing very good to do with them."

The two Caribs, however, seemed sodden with exhaustion, and made no further resistance, even when their little vessel was towed alongside the *Jocasta*, was hoisted out of the water and fairly deposited upon the deck of the ship.

Not even then did they move or speak, but crouched together like two wild animals, dangerous and sullen.

Men came crowding about with lanterns; for the great question amongst them all had been what was the heavy lading of that small craft which her owners would not abandon.

"You would have thought she was a Spanish galleon with her hold full of bar silver," said Timothy Tripp, thrusting a hand into the curious white substance with which the dugout was half filled. "Shells!" he ejaculated, as he held his palm to the red light of the lantern. "They have risked their lives and ours for a cargo of little curlicue shells!"

He gave over the handful to Michael, who examined them in his turn, turning them over carefully, the frail, conically twisted shells of some small sea snail. He examined them for some moments in absorbed silence, then motioned to have the lantern lifted until it shone directly upon the lowering hostile face of the big Carib Indian. With his other hand he drew from his pocket a handful of silver coins and held them out so that the red light fell upon a Spanish dollar, a few shillings and three or four of the misshapen bits of silver which the West Indians call cross money.

"How much?" he said briefly. Whether such words were spoken in English or French, Spanish or Dutch, the natives of the islands all knew their meaning.

The light of a slow smile spread across that countenance which a moment before had seemed like a carved mask of defiant hatred. The Carib's eyes glittered and his white teeth shone. From the coins spread out on Michael's palm he took one of the pieces of cross money, handed it to his comrade, then thrusting both hands into the mass of shell he held them out to Michael. The man was a trader, just as they were, although the wares

which he carried to market seemed so strange and useless to more civilized eyes.

Michael, however, received the product of his purchase gravely and carried it away to the cabin where he spread it upon the table. Captain Douglas and Charles Brigham, the first mate, had come below with him and now stood staring in wonder, first at him then at the tiny white shells scattered in the light of the swinging lamp.

"What strange folly is this, Mr. Slade?" the captain asked.

"Sit down," said Michael; "you of New England do not know as much of Indian ways as I do. This is, to Indian eyes, what refined gold would be to ours. They call it true wampum."

Many people have learned to designate by the name of wampum almost any form of the beads or shells which pass amongst the Indians for money. The tribes of Massachusetts would cut and bore the thick shells of the quahaug clam; others would use whatever material came most readily to hand. With incomplete understanding the white men have called all of these beads wampum, but are mistaken in so doing. The narrow pointed shells which are picked up in quantity along the coasts of Central America, readily pierced for stringing and easily colored, made up the first wampum used by the Indians; and all the other sorts have been a mere makeshift. By trade and plunder, it has been carried over the whole of the American continent. There is no tribe, no matter how remote, which does not have at least a single precious handful of it hoarded amongst the choicest treasures of the richest chief. Strings and belts of it are used to make record of the most solemn treaties. Beads and bright ornaments, horses and brass kettles—by all of these the different Indian tribes measure their outward standard

of wealth; but the true wampum is the rarest treasure in the eyes of them all.

This information Michael had picked up by chance amongst his friends the Seminoles. The odd fancies of childlike savages do not often linger in the minds of busy men; so that many who had heard of the same thing had straightway forgotten it. Once, when Michael was a boy of twelve, a Seminole chief had shown him a richly worked quiver of arrows, whose cover was embroidered with bright-colored porcupine quills in the pattern of running buffalo. The man had told him vaguely that it came from very far away, from beyond a great river and from near its upper waters where ice would bind the stream for many moons of the year. To the Seminole the region was as remote as the land of trolls or goblins might be. When Michael asked him how such a thing could have traveled so far, the Indian had shown him a handful of the little shells and had said:

“This go just as far, that come back.”

The fact had remained in his mind as evidence that the trading between tribe and tribe extended far more widely than any white man dreamed.

All this Michael explained to the other two below the swaying light in the *Jocasta's* cabin. These two Carib Indians evidently made regular voyages to gather the shell, which they exchanged amongst their kind for coconuts, fish and turtle eggs, and which they sold in turn to the white men. The cinnamon trader in his palm-thatched hut was as well established a merchant as Raoul La Rocque himself in his big countinghouse with its heavy mahogany furniture and its gold mirrors and satincushioned chairs brought out from France.

“For a little cross money we can buy the man's whole cargo,” Michael said.

Cross money was made up of the old Spanish coins,

clipped and battered almost beyond recognition, but still bearing stamped on their surface the cross or the royal arms which showed that they had once been of official value. Such rude wealth seemed to appeal far more to the Indian mind than the bewildering variety of doubloons, Spanish dollars or pieces of eight, and *louis d'or* of more established shape and workmanship.

"But why would we want to buy it?" demanded Charles Brigham.

"Because," Michael answered slowly, looking across at Captain Douglas, "if we should ever have any wish to trade with Indians, either in the islands or—on more remote coasts, this is the medium of exchange laid ready to our hands."

Charles Brigham uttered an exclamation of angry protest and rose from beside the table.

"If your talk is coming back to that, I will have done with you," he said. "I have heard all these wild words concerning the voyage of the *Columbia*, and how you and Captain Douglas have her ever in your minds. If you wish to go chasing a phantom of fortune, in some region beyond nowhere, be it understood that I remain behind to find a sober passage home or to some port where sailors, not madmen, are wont to fare."

A sudden stagger of the ship under increased onslaughts of the wind put a summary end to further discussion and sent them all three on deck.

The storm raged through the night but had blown itself out by morning, after carrying them well on their way to Basse Terre. The two Indians, once comprehending that they were not to be robbed, seemed delighted to complete their passage home on the *Jocasta*. They were not natives of the Island of Haiti, as it had first appeared, but belonged to that group of scattered islets, some of them scarcely yet named, in the neigh-

borhood of Guadeloupe and Dominica. For them it was a long and dangerous voyage to the mainland of Central America; but with their knowledge of winds and currents they would creep from island to island, from one small rocky cay to another, making the voyage several times in a year for the sake of the profit which it brought them. By means of a rough code of signs and a few greatly garbled French and Spanish words, they managed to give much information as to reefs and channels. This was of the greatest usefulness, as the *Jocasta* began to take her way cautiously from one harbor to another of that crescent-shaped scattering of rocks, palms and mountain peaks which make up the Windward and Leeward Islands. More than once the Carib trader, by means of such method as he could muster, indicated to Michael that, before they parted, he would be glad to exchange his whole cargo of shell for whatever sum the white men would be willing to offer. But Michael would shake his head, since no decision in that matter had yet been reached.

They were lying at anchor one still, hot evening in the landlocked harbor of a small island, San Cristobal, between Dominica and Martinique. The next morning their Carib passengers were to leave them, to finish the voyage to whatever handful of rocks and nodding palms it was which they actually called home. Michael had completed his business in the little town which lay buried in green foliage close to the edge of the water. He had brought to an end the last of their errands having to do with the disposal of their cargo, so that, when they cleared again, it would be for return to Port au Prince.

The green-encircled harbor was like a looking-glass, with the reflection of trees fringing its edge and with the images of a ship or two besides the *Jocasta* mirrored on its still surface. From a French vessel of old-fashioned

build there came across to them the sound of slow, chanted music. Michael stood leaning against the rail of the afterdeck, idle, dreaming and listening. It was so hot in the cabin below that Captain Douglas had brought up a roll of charts and papers and was sitting on a gear chest, with the maps spread out before him, bending forward to catch the last of the daylight, now almost gone. Charles Brigham, officially on watch, was walking slowly up and down; he, also, was stopping now and again to hearken to the singing whose sound spread far abroad above the still waters.

An old seaman, William Tuttle, had been telling Michael a quantity of tales having to do with the great naval battles all up and down the West Indies where French, Spanish, English and Dutch had contended for the mastery and by which the different islands had changed hands again and again. French and Spanish fleets had at various times taken refuge in this same bay, battered and wounded after some great struggle. Amongst the ships of Roman Catholic nations it was the custom, when they were lying in harbor, for the crew to muster at sunset, standing in a half-circle before the image of Our Lady of the Sea set high in the stern, and to sing a hymn to her as the light began to fade, that same hymn which was sounding now in a slow chant across the bay. It was not difficult for Michael to think how the music must have come drifting from those scarred and battered Spanish vessels and how, just as darkness fell, they saluted one another, according to custom, with the blast of silver trumpets. It seemed as though it was the dreamed-of sound of those same silver trumpets which went with him through all the adventures which were to follow that peaceful hour.

Captain Douglas had also been lost in some vision of his own; for he had sat without moving for some time,

the charts still spread before him, although it was so dark he could have made out nothing upon them. Now, however, he turned about and summoned Michael and Charles Brigham to him.

"To-morrow," he said quietly, "we turn about upon our course to return to Port au Prince. And from there—"

He did not go on, for the discussion as to the next portion of their voyage had not yet been carried to an end. Many times talk had waxed hot in the cabin, and the three had struggled in argument, over the whole range of possible venture. The final decision lay, by right, between the captain and Michael, as the master of the ship and the representative of the owners. But the steady resistance of Charles Brigham to what he called the mad project which was in the minds of the other two had been a check upon Captain Douglas' making up his mind. Impulse was driving him one way and prudence another. Neither Michael's fiery and visionary persuasions nor Charles Brigham's cold, steady disbelief could hasten him to his final judgment. Now postponement was no longer possible; here in these still waters, in the dead silence of the breathless dusk, they must determine what storms and seas the *Jocasta* was to face, what strange shores and what far ports she was to see.

When Captain Douglas invited the renewal of the argument, each of the two younger men seemed more firmly established in his own belief than ever.

"Every day," Charles Brigham said hotly to Michael, "I see you pull out of your pocket that handful of shells and stand looking at them as though that Carib Indian had thrown one of his witch-doctor spells upon you. Will you never have done with such trifling and turn your mind to the purposes for which this ship set sail?"

"And what were those purposes?" Michael returned with equal vehemence. "To carry a cargo to market

by established routes only, lest by chance there should be aught of danger or risk of loss? To take the way followed by a thousand ships before us; to accept the rulings, the forbiddings and the confiscation which lords in council, kings and petty princes choose to lay upon us? Shall the whole world say that American trade can do no more than this, to stand humbly waiting in overcrowded ports and take what the others leave?"

Back and forth the contention went, the captain saying little, the two hot-heads saying much. At last, more for want of breath than for their having silenced each other, Michael and Charles Brigham ceased speaking. The captain's face was hidden in the gloom, nor could either of them guess what he was thinking. They were waiting for him, but finally unable to keep silent, Michael burst out again.

"Ah," he cried, "if only Nicholas Drury were here!"

Captain Douglas turned toward him with sudden directness. "If he were here, what do you think that he would say?" he asked.

"I do not need to think. I know," cried Michael. "He would say, turn your backs on those jostling places of trade where there is never-ending combat for the first place, and where men must hate each other because they are too many. He would say that if some new route offered, some way to extend trade rather than to take it away from others, then thither should the *Jocasta* sail. It was for that he built her."

"Can you give me your word, Michael, that this is the truth?" the captain insisted, and the boy answered simply:

"My word of honor, sir, that this is so. There are no secrets between Nicholas Drury and me. Each of us knew what was in the other's heart when we set our hands to this task."

Very slowly and reflectively Captain Douglas spoke.

"There must always be men to try out new ways or the world would never go forward."

In the long pause which followed, Charles Brigham shifted from one foot to the other, opened his lips as though to speak then closed them again. It was as though he, with the other two, was seeing the same vision, of Magellan feeling his way through those stormy straits which were evermore to be his own; of Cabral, tossed and wind-buffed, the sport of adverse tempests which carried him within view of an unknown tropical country of unmeasured riches; of Drake, slipping into his home port, weary, battered and triumphant, all the way around the world in the little *Golden Hind* and back safe to Devon at last! In that space of quiet, Charles Brigham knew himself beaten. It was he who broke the silence.

"I can see," he declared, "that your minds are made up at last."

"Yes," Captain Douglas answered him. "The minds of all of us seem to have come to their decision. You are the best first officer I have ever had, Mr. Brigham. I shall be loth to lose you."

Charles Brigham turned his head to look forward along the deck, where the clean graceful lines of the ship narrowed to the bows, their final lift being lost in shadows; he glanced upward at her towering masts, the upper spars shrouded in the velvet darkness. He swallowed hard and spoke briefly.

"A man who has once sailed on the *Jocasta* does not lightly leave her for another. I—go where she goes."

"Good," cried Michael.

The captain was fumbling with the roll of papers upon his knee. "Michael," he said, "bring a lantern."

The three bent close in the narrow illumination as Captain Douglas spread out his maps. The first was of the coast of Spain, France and the Mediterranean,

covered thick with names of ports, of boundaries and of principalities, the close-crowded, divided region where remorseless competition and warring interest had again and again locked in deadly combat through the whole tale of history.

"Not this," he said, and unrolled the other.

Here was a map very different, with long stretches of seacoast almost unmarked by a name, with lines of capes and bays so vaguely drawn that it was evidently only hearsay which had given information for that charting of the long sweep of South America, and the upward-reaching Pacific shore of two continents. Whalers seeking their quarry in southern seas, Russian hunters at the north, a few, a very few English ships taking their way eastward from China and back again, had brought back scanty information that here was a harbor, there an island, there a stretch of iron-bound cliff no man knew how many hundred miles long. It was like the map of another world for which only legend and fancy had drawn the charts.

Captain Douglas' finger was running downward from the West Indies, out around the curve of Brazil.

"Here is Rio," he was saying, "and here is Montevideo—" His finger went down and down, out of the tropics, through the steady, temperate regions, down to the stormy, unfettered seas where all land ends.

"And here is Cape Horn."



CHAPTER IX

WICKANANISH

The keen breezes of autumn in New England and the languorous softness of the West Indian early winter had been changed now for something which called itself summer and which offered hail giving place to snow, and chilly fog only yielding to furious gales with driving squalls of cutting rain. This was the mildest season for vessels to brave the stubborn resistance of the seas which washed Cape Horn. When mist or rain or driving snow parted long enough to afford any extended view, Michael, on the slippery, wind-swept deck of the *Jocasta*, could see the enormous, gray rollers, looking as though they must be a mile at least between crest and crest, moving past in untiring procession. Up one long, long slope the *Jocasta* would toil and climb with the wind drumming in her taut, close-reefed canvas, to labor across the summit and go plunging down and down, then to begin the long upward struggle once more. Only exactly the right wind could carry them through the more sheltered Straits of Magellan and this wind having been denied them, they were obliged to face the full force of the screaming gales as they doubled the Cape.

It seemed that it must have been in some other existence that they had lain in the dreamy waters of that West Indian bay and had finally determined to set their course into the stormy unknown. They had run back across the Caribbean to Port au Prince, to take on provisions and to gather such cargo as might be of use to them at their remote destinations of the Northwest Coast and China. The Carib trader had referred them to a dusky partner of his own on the Island of Guadeloupe from whom Michael purchased a still greater quantity of the delicate shell money upon which even Captain Douglas looked with some misgiving.

"I suppose you know what you are doing," he said doubtfully, "but it seems strange to me that such valueless stuff should be given cargo room and be carried so far."

"It is scarcely so valueless as that paper money of ours at home, with which poor Nicholas Drury's strong box is stuffed full," replied Michael. "Whatever this is worth, I intend to take the chance of carrying it with us. Where we are going, values and moneys are things at which we can only guess."

Monsieur Raoul La Rocque, when he was told of the proposed expedition, threw his hands into the air in a truly Gallic frenzy of horror and dismay.

"Oh, my dear young friend," he exclaimed almost in tears, "that you and your good captain and your noble ship should come to such an end as this! For you will never come back, that is one thing which the dullest eye can see; you will never come back!"

From this unhappy conviction he could not be moved by any encouraging argument which Michael could offer. Nor was Michael in his turn to be shaken in his resolution by any of the kindly Frenchman's efforts to dissuade him. The friendly little man, even though he continued to deplore their rashness, proceeded to bend all his efforts

toward helping them make proper preparation for the voyage. He found the most advantageous places for them to purchase the supplies they needed, insisted, with a wisdom for which they blessed him afterward, on their laying in a double and triple supply of the smooth green limes which are the sailors' defense against scurvy, and brought them speech, here and there, with seamen who chanced to have some knowledge of those coasts past which their projected course was to take them. Several had been in Montevideo or had visited the Falkland Islands; a few knew something even of Valparaiso and, one whose more prosperous days had evidently known something of buccaneering, talked of "Quoquembo," a place even more distant, "very rich with gold."

It was not riches of just that sort which Michael was seeking; for he had stored in his hold a fairly good quantity of the Spanish silver dollars, the pieces of eight, for which he had sold his original cargo. These, so he understood, were more generally current in all the known ports of the world than any other form of money. With all the stray information which he could gather concerning the islands and harbors of the coast of South America, he found the sum of knowledge very scanty indeed.

"People will know more after we come back," he observed cheerfully to Monsieur La Rocque, and was touched to see the tears really standing now in the kind-hearted little man's eyes.

"If you ever really reach the shore of China, and arrive at Canton, the one port where foreign ships trade," he said, "it were wise for you to seek out a certain Chinese merchant whose heathen name, if I recollect it rightly, is Leung Tsi-pun. A friend of mine who commanded one of the few French vessels which has voyaged to that port has told me of him as a man, in spite of his yellow face, of great honor and integrity and having keen interest in

building up the trade with nations whose sea is the Atlantic."

As a last office Monsieur La Rocque undertook to dispatch, by the first northbound ship leaving Port au Prince, the letter which Michael had written to Nicholas, setting forth with fiery ardor the plan and prospects for the *Jocasta's* voyage. Here was one, at least, who would share his enthusiasm, Michael felt as he wrote, letting his glowing dream expand for once, freed of the cold pressure of all the doubts which had surrounded him. "You will be many months without hearing from us again," he ended. "Oh, if only you could be sailing with us!"

His letter to Nicholas telling of their first arrival at Port au Prince had been sent by a French brigantine bound for Baltimore. This second missive, the Frenchman promised, should be forwarded at the first opportunity. A Danish schooner, whose course was to lie through the Bahamas and touch at Norfolk was the carrier of that letter. A gale off Cape Hatteras, a splintered wreck in the boiling surf, from which all hands were saved but with vessel and cargo a total loss, could have told the tale of why the message never reached the hand for which it was meant.

Michael, by that time, was below the equator, where the smooth, heaving waters, which looked as though they were covered with oil, were giving way to the more turbulent seas which wash beyond the outthrust shoulder of South America and the port of Pernambuco. Nicholas, at home in Branscomb, looking out on the flying spray and loud-voiced surf of a January storm, could know as little as did Michael whither had gone that message into which one friend had put the whole of his eager heart for the comfort and reassurance of the other.

Once past the Horn, the Pacific sea proved itself true to that name which the Spanish explorers had so gratefully

given it. The doubling of the Cape had seemed endless, even though it had lasted for no very great number of weeks; but this voyage across blue waters, sped by fresh and seldom-failing breezes, seemed short in spite of the almost unbelievable number of miles which it finally covered. In the memories of all those voyagers, and in that of Michael in particular, there remained long after brief, vivid pictures of certain spots on that tremendous stretch of coast. There was Valparaiso, the shape of whose harbor with its scattered rocks and breaker-washed islands resembled somehow the harbor at Branscomb, save for the rugged mountains which made its background instead of the rolling hills checkered with little fields and dotted with clumps of pleasant woods. There was Callao, that port out of which had poured the treasures of the Incas, to be carried to Panama, there borne across the Isthmus to be shipped for Spain and so often to fall into the hands of buccaneers. Michael caught faintly hinted tales of those desperate marauders, stories which still haunted the sun-baked wharves of the sleepy Spanish cities. Then there came the long northeastward reach past Central America and that rich province of New Spain which the iron hand of Cortez had taken from the Montezumas.

At last the palm-fringed coast, sometimes verdant, sometimes dry and barren, began to change into a region more familiar, with the dark green of pines showing amongst the tropical foliage and with a clear invigorating freshness in the air after the long hot laziness of the tropics. Perhaps the most vivid impression of all those stamped upon Michael's mind was of a tremendous mountain, snowclad at its summit, wrapped below in a dark green garment of pine forest, its base touching the sea, below a mile-wide slope of golden poppies. Or was there perhaps an even more telling memory of wreaths of fog,

which suddenly lifted before an onshore wind and showed an iron expanse of unbroken rocky cliffs, with breakers smashing below and splintering themselves into gigantic fountains of white spray.

They had stopped here and there for water or for provisions as opportunity seemed to offer, but nowhere had they tarried long. Spaniards, brown natives, then Spaniards again had regarded them with scarcely believing wonder. But now at last they swung into the wide mouth of an open harbor and dropped their anchor with a clatter and a splash, for they had seen a ship lying in the shadow of a green hill and at her masthead flew the Stars and Stripes.

The *Columbia*, out of Boston, had sailed some time before them, but had made so lengthy a voyage, touching even at the Cape Verde Islands, that she had not been so long in advance of them. What a shout went up from her decks as, here in this lost world, her crew saw a vessel of their own country come to anchor so close beside them. Boats were lowered from both ships almost on the instant and came pulling across the deep, green waters of the bay to meet halfway in such a clatter of excited greetings and questionings that, so Michael commented to Captain Douglas, it might have been a Branscomb ladies' tea-drinking.

As they approached the anchored ship, they could see that, beyond her, in the shallower water near the shore, lay a smaller vessel which must be the sloop, the *Lady Washington*. Michael and the captain were received on board the *Columbia* with enthusiastic welcome by her commanding officer. There need be no question of trade rivalry here, for in that vast forested world there was room for all. The only question of success was seamanship and daring, and skill in the complicated mysteries of an entirely new commerce.

"Did you ever, for your sins, attempt to bargain with

a red Indian savage?" questioned Captain Kendrick, as they sat together in his cabin. "The patience of Job is only one of the things necessary; the wisdom and quick wit of Solomon are needed also, as well as something of the courage and steadfastness of Daniel."

While he was speaking, a quiet pleasant-faced man had come down from the deck to join them and was introduced as Captain Robert Gray, master of the consort sloop, *Lady Washington*. He had smiled on hearing his colleague's comment upon the difficulties of negotiation with the neighboring inhabitants.

"Like all other tasks, it requires some practice and knowledge to carry on trade for furs," he declared, "although I admit it seems to me that it would take a long lifetime to learn to understand the strange moods and fancies of these Northwest Indians. They are eager for friendly trade with us, and yet smoulderingly hostile beneath their appearance of peace. They do not yet know whether they will get the more by offering us seal and otter skins, or by attempting, at some opportune moment, to swarm aboard and massacre us and take possession of our stores. Behind those stolid red faces it seems to me that I can see them continually turning over that vexed question within their minds."

"What have you brought for exchanging with them?" Captain Douglas inquired.

The answer of the commander of the *Columbia* was accompanied by a groan and followed by a broad grin upon the face of his companion.

"They said in Boston that Indians were like children, so that those wise men who launched our venture sent us hither with the most of our stock made up—" His tone of disgust told an unhappy story, "made up of rattles and jew's-harps. The red men, after the curiosity of the first moment, will have none of them."

The comment of Captain Douglas was in a voice almost as disheartened. "I doubt whether we have done any better. Michael, can you show him some of that treasure which you have chosen to carry round the Horn for the tempting of these far-off savages?"

Michael plunged his hand into his pocket and produced a sample of the much disputed shell. The two men of the *Columbia* bent their heads to examine it, then looked first at each other and then at the red-haired young man before them in startled amazement.

"Great Heaven, lad," ejaculated Captain Kendrick; "how did you come to know of that? Whenever a new chief comes to trade with us he first pulls out some little ornament made of just such shells as these and asks, hopefully, by signs, whether, since we came from the southward, we have brought anything like that. Their faces always fall when we must say no."

They fell to explaining at some length the difficulties which they had met with in bartering with the Indians. Metal for spear and arrowheads was what the red men most greatly desired; but, as this had not been foreseen, the amount of the iron and copper which the two vessels could spare had quickly been exhausted. The Indians had abundance of furs to sell; but the slow process of exchange seemed to make the gathering of a cargo an interminable task. One tribe and another would send their warriors in canoes, either to where the *Columbia* lay or to the *Lady Washington* who, with her lighter draught, could seek out the shallower bays and mouths of the rivers. Each group of red men would have, sometimes a score, sometimes fifty or sixty pelts of sea otter and seal, with an offering besides of the less valuable skins of land otter, elk, mink and wolf. Since there was no fixed price, the process of trade was intricate and laborious; certain of the Indians would exchange their wares for anything

which happened to take their fancy, while certain shrewder tribes knew enough to hold out for the highest possible price.

"We have brought a quantity of beads; yet even these were many of them unfortunate as to color. Blue ones are far more acceptable than red, for some reason, and white worth very little. We have happened to provide far more of the red than of any other kind; but when we offer them the Indians shake their heads and insist that they must have the blue."

This was the information which Captain Kendrick gave; while Captain Gray added to it facts of graver import. Much of this he offered while he was rowing back to the *Jocasta* with Michael, for the sake of fetching some supplies and medicines which it was arranged that the vessels were to exchange.

"A great many of the savages are well convinced that it would be the simplest matter of getting what they desire to fall upon us and take it, as is their fashion with their enemies. They fear our guns somewhat, but not so greatly as one might suppose. But the principal chief of this neighborhood has managed to get through his savage mind the knowledge that we might return to our own country and then come back again to trade with him further, so that it would be short-sighted policy to make an end of us now. Yet it is plain to see that the temptation to destroy us is sometimes almost greater than they can resist. Of all the advice which I can give you, hearken to this with your greatest heed. Never let more than a dozen of their warriors be upon your ship at the same time. They will come in scores and hundreds to trade, and they will profess great indignation if you keep them waiting in their canoes, but of that you need take no account. And if at any time when their boats are lying all about you, and you observe that they are sending the

women ashore, then deal out your muskets and cutlasses and run out your guns, for there is going to be a battle."

He gave directions to the men at the oars to pull the boat close inshore past a jutting outcrop of rocks partly hidden by a turn in the curve of the beach. Shattered against the great boulders and wedged in their iron hold lay the remains of a ship, a brig perhaps she had once been, or one of the older two-masted vessels which men called "snows." Some fluttering rags of canvas still clung to her yards, but her broken timbers, covered with barnacles, showed how long she had lain there in the rising and falling tide.

"What was she?" Michael asked.

"A British trader or a Russian seal-hunters' vessel, perhaps," Captain Gray said. "A few of them reached these coasts after a voyage out from China, and returned across the Pacific to sell their seal and otter in the port of Canton. Here is one which met misfortune, though how long ago I am not certain."

"And what has become of her men?" Michael asked.

"There can be little doubt of what was their fate," the other replied. "Once they were helpless, the Indians had their way with both men and ship. One hears ghastly tales of the wreckers on the coasts of our own Atlantic seas, and of how little mercy they sometimes show to those unfortunates whom the tempest has cast into their hands. And these Indians, can we believe that they would be less ruthless? Make careful choice of your anchorage. If your ship be torn from her moorings or be driven upon any rock or shoal, the end will come very quickly."

They turned their bow toward the *Jocasta* and Captain Gray, as his eye traveled over her finely modeled hull and tall masts, announced with conviction, "I would stake almost anything that it was Thomas Drury who built that ship."

"It was Nicholas Drury instead," Michael told him, speaking his friend's name with glowing pride. He related the tale of how the *Jocasta* had been sent to sea, and Robert Gray nodded in pleased understanding.

"The men who financed us chanced to be among the few who still had money behind them, and yet ours was thought to be a bold venture," he said. "What was it then for the Drurys, uncle and nephew, and for a little community like Branscomb where so much had been lost by the fortunes of the sea? Such courage deserves success, and with all my heart I hope and believe that it will come to you."

A few days later the *Jocasta* sailed to seek out another stretch of coast and there to begin trading on her own account. The men of the *Columbia* and the *Lady Washington* gave them every information they could concerning headlands and harbors, rocks and shoals, but, for the most part, the cruise was a matter of feeling the way, of standing well out to sea and then coming in with great precaution and sounding, wherever some cleft in the hills suggested the mouth of a river or a possible port. They chose at last for their anchorage an irregular bay sheltered from the worst of the west and southwest winds, with a broad river pouring into it, whose wooded banks wound far away and disappeared into mountains. Even as the *Jocasta* slid into the harbor and came to rest at her moorings, her crew could see moving figures upon the shore, and copper-brown faces peering out at them from among the trees.

The very next day a few venturesome canoes came skimming out to the ship's side, and their navigators, both men and women, scrambled aboard. All carried rolled-up bundles of skins, and all were brought down into that portion of the space below, which had been taken for a trade room. Michael, his heart beating high with

excitement, since he was now to put all his knowledge and skill to the test, strove to match the unmoving faces of the savages with a countenance as noncommittal as their own. He could see one or two of the warriors and the squaws whispering together and casting glances of wonder at his flaming hair. A word was passing from one to another, whose meaning must undoubtedly be "red." Behind him Charles Brigham stood ready to assist him, waiting with very obvious doubts to see how the first negotiations would end.

The leader, a chief whose name had been stated to be Wickananish, came forward to stand by the table. He was not built like the Seminole Indians with whom Michael was familiar, being shorter and less gracefully made, with smaller and more irregular features, and with heavy feet and legs not quite straight. His clothing was uncouth and scanty, a tattered garment of skins flung carelessly about his shoulders and fastened at the neck by a sinew cord. Yet the torn cloaklike dress had, when new, been made of supple, lustrous otter skin. He flung down a deep, rich pelt of the same fur before Michael, and looked at him with a calculating, avaricious glance which plainly said, "How much?" The look of greed is the same in any man's eyes, regardless of blood or color. The narrow-eyed scrutiny was extraordinarily similar to that which Michael had once before observed on the face of Joseph Ryall.

Michael, holding his rarest commodity in reserve, brought forth specimens of all those other things which he had ready for exchange, first a handful of silver dollars, then tobacco, some big glass beads and some lengths of the red and blue cloth. The man examined them carefully, not showing the least enthusiasm over anything. He made signs to indicate that they were a very poor tribe and had only a small quantity of furs to offer. Then

he indicated what amount of tobacco or beads or scarlet duffel cloth he would take for the otter skin. The price was absurdly high even in that rough medium of barter.

In some disappointment, Michael pondered the problem of exchange. He, in turn, made a sign to express his disapprobation, whereat the Indian, with a complete air of indifference, rolled up the skin as though the discussion were over. The group behind him gathered together as if for departure, since evidently the word of their chief was to be their only guide in the matter. Michael, whose move it now was in this odd, silent game, leaned over the table, and pointed to the chain of bears' claws which hung about the man's neck. There was apparently some ornament at the end of it which was concealed beneath his garment. This, so Michael made him understand by signs, he would like to see. The man hesitated, then finally thrust his hand beneath the fur and pulled out the dangling object which he held up with a look of pride and condescension as though to declare:

"You have nothing like this."

Back of his shoulder, Michael could hear Charles Brigham draw a sudden breath. It was surely almost like the latter end of a fairy tale to see the man produce a round ornament fashioned from the slim, pointed shells of the true wampum. With careful deliberation, and with no betrayal of any feeling, he himself brought out a small box, lifted the cover and showed the red chief that it was full of the same shell.

Against every habit and tradition of a warrior's proper bearing, the man cried out in joyful wonder. The others came crowding to his side, to look and peer and jabber amongst themselves, while one of them, moved by irresistible desire, reached forward to take the treasure from the white trader's hand. Michael stepped back, immediately on guard, while Charles Brigham moved up

to array himself beside his friend. The flurry of excitement was over in an instant, however, and the Indians had regained their self-possession. Their leader, by means of signs which he had to repeat for the white men to understand, was asking the question, "Have you more of this?"

That it might be understood at once that the trading was to be on a large scale, Michael opened one of the chests beside the wall and showed that it was full to the brim with wampum. He indicated two other oaken boxes and a row of big canvas bags, all of which, he made them understand, were filled with the desired riches. He scarcely liked the look of crafty delight which spread over the face of Wickananish and the glance he exchanged with his followers, who had clustered behind to gape over their leader's shoulder.

"Perhaps that was not quite wise," he noted within himself; but forgot his misgiving in the magical result which the sight of the wampum had produced. Skins and furs immediately appeared from under every cloak. They who had professed themselves as so poor in goods produced them now in generous quantity. The squaws were sent back to the canoes, to bring even more and finally were dispatched to the shore to fetch some reserve store which the crafty traders had not at first thought it wise to bring with them. At this move Michael conveyed a stern order by means of gesture. If the women went the men must go also. The chief gave him an angry, cunning glance, having in it, however, some reluctant respect. Such white men as he had met before had not been quite so keen-eyed to see possible peril. He departed with his warriors and presently returned with such an abundance of the furry coats of seal and otter, beaver and wolf, that the trade-room table was presently piled high with the spoils, and every Indian had paddled away completely satisfied.

"With such brisk exchange as this," Michael reported joyfully to Captain Douglas, "we should have a sufficient cargo of seal and otter within a month."

The problem of dealing with Indian nature was, nevertheless, not so easily simple as he had believed. Once the red men were convinced that the supply of wampum shells was actually real, once each had satisfied his lifelong desire to own a handful of the treasure, the process of negotiation assumed a new aspect. For a few days no Indians came, as though they were sitting at their own firesides, exulting in their strange riches. Then at length, having gathered more furs, possibly by barter or pressure among their neighbors, they returned to the task of exchange. Through Wickananish their spokesman, they announced firmly that the price had risen.

In the first transaction one cupful of the shell had been exchanged for two otter skins. It was now made plain that the order was reversed, two cupsful for a single pelt of otter, with the other prices in proportion. Michael shook his head in refusal, Wickananish shook his in obstinate determination. He had brought more warriors with him than before, but of these only half a dozen were suffered to come on board the *Jocasta*. In spite of grunts and grumbles and attempted exchange of argument, neither side would give way. There was no trading that day. They returned next morning to open negotiations again. This time the price asked was three times the first. Michael refused emphatically, and exchange came definitely to a standstill.

Then, the word apparently having traveled through the country that Wickananish's village had been trafficking with the whites for the greatly valued wampum, other Indians began to bring their wares to market. They came dropping down the river in small fleets of dugout canoes, and paddled alongside the *Jocasta*, sometimes

with anxious glances cast over their shoulders toward the shore. A few of them expressed desire to trade for other things; for men vary even in such alien races; some are thrifty and some merely desire the possessions which will count them as wealthy in the eyes of their neighbors.

When such commerce had gone on for a little time it was suddenly interrupted. Charles Brigham sent down from his early morning watch to arouse the captain and Michael at dawn.

"There is nothing really wrong," he admitted, "but there are things going forward on the shore which I do not like, more stirring and peering amongst the trees than ever before and then suddenly nobody, and not even the smoke of a campfire. There is something brewing."

They could only wait, listen and conjecture, while they watched that stretch of wooded shore about the mouth of the river, where their red neighbors had of late gone so openly about their business of hunting and cooking, of skinning and tanning. Yet after long silence and listening, first Michael then the others heard a faint sound, which grew and gathered volume, and carried to them down the wind a message of terrible burden. Every sailor dropped his work and came to the rail to listen. There is no one who can ever mistake the meaning of that cry, the swelling triumphant yell of the Indian war whoop.

"It is a long way off," said Captain Douglas and Michael added quickly:

"I believe it is not for us. They are fighting those Indians who have come to trade and are driving them back into the hills."

They made preparation for possible battle, and rested half a day upon their arms. But it seemed that Michael had indeed guessed the truth, for whenever they heard renewed that death-heralding cry, it was fainter and at a greater distance. The hot sun lay over the green land-

scape and the rising, wooded hills; the water of the bay lapped softly about them, and nowhere was there sign of what might be the outcome of that struggle going forward so many miles away.

When noon had passed, the crew of the *Jocasta* returned to their various occupations, though still with eyes and ears alert. Toward sunset an object came floating and bobbing round the curve of the river and drifted out into the bay. The men of the *Jocasta* lowered a boat and brought it in, a smashed canoe bearing a slain Indian whose garments and headdress showed that he was not of that immediate tribe which dwelt so close to them. By sunrise next day the campfires were burning in their accustomed place; the warriors were going back and forth amongst the trees; the women were chattering together at the water side. There seemed no indication that anything out of the way had happened, except for one thing—the traders from the more distant-dwelling tribes, whose canoes had once lain about the *Jocasta* in hundreds, now came no more.

Captain Douglas had the longboat fitted with mast and provisions and sent her with Charles Brigham and a selected crew to explore the near-by coast and seek out another anchorage for the *Jocasta* and another place for trade. They returned with the report that nowhere within several days' cruise was there a proper harbor for their ship, and that farther north the land seemed so barren and uninhabited that it was scarcely worth establishing another center for traffic in skins.

"We would only have the same difficulty over again. We may as well wear the problem to an end here," declared Captain Douglas, and his two officers agreed with him.

For a few weeks it was possible, by cruising up and down the coast in the longboat, to gather furs from the villagers on the little bays and islands or along the shores

of the rivers. Evidently every one had heard of the *Jocasta* and at first all came eagerly to exchange their goods for tobacco, cloth and shell. But in every place the activity was short-lived. The men would begin either to demand twice and three times the original price, mounting far beyond what was possible for Michael to pay in trade goods, or else they would shake their heads and indicate that they had nothing more to offer.

"There was one copper-faced ruffian," fumed Charles Brigham, who had become as eager and enthusiastic for the trade as Michael himself, "who told me yesterday in that single word 'quan-come,' which I have learned all too well means 'nothing more,' that there were no more pelts to be obtained and at the very moment, instead of the ragged skins in which he was clothed yesterday, he was wrapped in a garment of new-tanned furs that would have graced a king's coronation feast. He swung it about him with an air of majesty as he walked away, but he looked back over his shoulder to make note of my discomfiture."

Day after day passed with neither buyers nor sellers willing to retire from the position each had taken. Outwardly all was pleasantly peaceful between the white men on the *Jocasta* and their dusky neighbors. The Indians brought salmon, deer and bear meat to trade for cloth and beads; they introduced the newcomers to wapattoo, the pleasant-tasting root of the swamp plant arrowhead; they even produced in time such inferior skins as those of raccoon, elk or fox. It was plainly understood on both sides that it was only in the matter of that principal item of trade, seal and otter fur, that there was to be no compromise.

Often those from the *Jocasta* went ashore to hunt, Michael being the most enthusiastic and the most skillful sportsman amongst them. Timothy Tripp liked to ac-

company him; so that together these two learned to know much of that densely wooded stretch of country which reached from the sea to the mountains. They were never tired of tramping through the shady glades, of wondering at the enormous size of the trees, of hiding in the underbrush and watching the bears come with their shambling and rolling walk down to the edge of the river, to feed on huckleberries or to wade in shoulder deep and snap up the salmon which went swimming past. Timothy Tripp developed great dexterity at making himself understood by the Indians in their own sign language, and had even grown to be on something like friendly terms with one or two amongst them.

Michael came upon him one day dining pleasantly with a grizzled warrior, his squaw and two young sons. The woman had made some kind of savory stew of meat and wapattoo, which she had cooked in one of their curious pots of closely woven grass in which, since they cannot be set over the fire, the food and water were heated by dropping in hot stones. Michael arrived just as the meal was ended, and as the red household, who were on a hunting expedition of their own, were preparing to move onward. The squaw emptied the cooking pot and set it upside down upon her head; since it served as a hat during the time that it was not needed for the preparation of dinner. Tripp regarded the action with some dismay, as though it threw a cloud over the pleasant memory of the dinner which he had just consumed.

"I wonder just what was the meat she cooked for us," he speculated rather anxiously.

"Probably wildcat or muskrat," Michael suggested, at which his companion gave a rueful grin.

The experience, however, did not seem to quench his sociable instinct; for a few days later Michael once more discovered him in the company of a new acquaintance,

this time a single young brave. The Indian had cut down a big fir trunk and was fashioning it into a canoe, a slow and laborious process with his clumsy tools of stone or copper. Timothy Tripp was hewing away with his big hunting knife, helping the man and talking to him busily, although he was entirely unable to make himself understood. He had somehow, however, gathered a knowledge of the other's plans and hopes; for he told Michael that the canoe was to be an especially choice one, since the Indian was making it for the purpose of winning himself a wife.

It was the established custom that when a young warrior desired an Indian maiden in marriage, he must offer to her father a canoe in exchange for her. The lonely-hearted Timothy, thinking forlornly of his far-away Henrietta, seemed to feel much in common with the young bridegroom-to-be, whose name, it appeared, was Hanno, and was aiding him with all his heart. For a number of days he went ashore, bringing tools from the ship, to help his new friend with such absorbed zeal that Michael was left to hunt and fish alone.

Many were Michael's thoughts of his far-away friend in those long still hours which he spent lying in wait for shy deer or wary salmon, listening to the vast whispering silence of the forest around him. How he would have liked to show it all to Nicholas; how he wondered as to what his friend might be doing and thinking. He had left his partner to a single-handed struggle against great odds, against difficult fortunes and against the enmity of Darius Corland. Did things go well with him or ill? Were those about him beginning to murmur that the voyage of the *Jocasta* had already lasted for almost a year, with no news of her save that she had sought out the unknown Northwest Coast? It would be hard for Nicholas for a little while longer; but how it would all be made up to him, a thousandfold! What a day it

would be when the *Jocasta*, after trading her furs in China for teas and silks, should come back rejoicing with the riches of the Orient in her hold. Even though these sullen Indians were for the present ruining all chance of profit in the voyage, Michael's brilliant hopes would suffer no thought of the possibility of defeat.

There were other fancies and recollections also, those which held the dancing image of Dolly Drury,—Dolly who toiled as industriously and devotedly as her brother, yet to whom the world with its changing fortunes seemed always a matter for laughter rather than misgiving or dismay. How Dolly would have loved the boundless beauty of this vast country with its forest and mountains, its wild flowers blooming so abundantly in the soft wet air, its bright birds and its brimming streams! That unexplored wilderness which lay between them might have been the gulf between two planets, so impossible was it for any word or message to pass to that pair on the rugged shores of New England from their red-haired comrade sitting on a great fallen log in the midst of a pathless wood, thinking of them in such absorption that presently a large and overhungry salmon threatened to jerk his fish line from his hand.

It had been past midsummer when the *Jocasta* had first come upon the shores of Northwestern America; it was autumn now, not the brisk, windy autumn of New England, but a warm, wet season which hid the hills and mountains in low-hanging veils of cloud and rain. The Indians had finally made one more offering of furs, this time for thrice the amount first demanded, instead of four times greater, as had been their last suggestion. There had been black looks when Michael declined, but as yet no signs of real hostility. There was, nevertheless, an indefinable change in their attitude, a sulky watchfulness, which had not been there before.

"They seem to be waiting for something," observed Timothy Tripp. Although he had come to know more of them than did any of the others, not even he could guess what it might be.

A little later, storms began to fall upon them, great booming winds sweeping in from the sea to lash their little harbor into a welter of white caps. Captain Douglas for the first time began to seem doubtful. "We can never ride out the winter here," he declared. "And it begins to appear that we will not have a complete cargo before spring." Michael exclaimed in dismay. Such long delay as that seemed, to his impatient spirit, impossible to endure. Yet within their hold were packed away only a little over nine hundred fur pelts, while his lowest estimate of a full lading called for two thousand.

Charles Brigham refrained from adding gloom to the situation by any grumbling or harking back to the warnings which he had once uttered. He was one of those who voices all his doubts at the beginning of an enterprise, then, having once made up his mind to embark upon it, does not look behind him. All his attention seemed to be centered now upon the proper handling of the *Jocasta* in case of even heavier storms. "In a stronger gale than this we would have to slip our cable and put to sea," he declared, "It would never do to drag anchor for we would be driven upon the bar."

The mouth of the river, broad and deep as the stream was for a number of miles, would have offered them safe sanctuary if it had not been for that narrow but impassable barrier. Many times they had rowed up and down and across it, sounding everywhere in the hope of finding some deeper scoured channel where their ship might cross. But even at the height of the tide, the water on the bar was definitely too shallow for a vessel of the *Jocasta's* draught.

Their neighbors, the Indians, proved themselves even more excellent boatmen than had at first appeared. Heavy swells in the bay, choppy and turbulent seas between the river banks, seemed to make small difference to their weatherwise canoes. They still came paddling out to the *Jocasta* with such wares as they had been accustomed to bring; yet it was plain that their manner of scowling ill-will was verging more and more upon open hatred.

"They are like children who have been denied something that they want," Charles Brigham said; but Michael shook his head.

"He who counts upon the childlike nature of the savage is betrayed to his undoing," he returned. "Children are neither crafty nor ferocious; and these men can no longer hide the fact that they are both."

A certain afternoon came, with still, but heavily brooding weather, when a party of men were sent ashore to fetch water. Formerly this task had been gone through almost every day, one or two of the crew being sent out alone to accomplish it. Now, the captain, who had put an end to the hunting expeditions of Michael and Tripp, had also decreed that a good number of men must always go ashore together and that as many casks as possible should be taken in the longboat and filled up at extended intervals. On this day he had accompanied the party himself, taking Michael with him and leaving Charles Brigham in charge of the *Jocasta*.

There was no sign of an Indian anywhere, even though the path by which they went back and forth to the accustomed pool of clear water led close past Wickananish's village. The men were glad to be on land and made rather a longer task than was necessary, laughing and joking and dallying over their work, in no haste to bring it to an end. Finally the captain, waiting in the boat,

sent word to Michael, superintending beside the pool, that they were to make greater speed, since there was bad weather in sight. Hard on the heels of this messenger came another, running. The captain ordered that they were to leave everything and come immediately to the shore, or the storm would break before they could get back to the ship. The tide was at its height, and it would be difficult to launch the boat should they delay until it dropped.

Even then it was in a laughing rush that the men went streaming along the wooded path, laughter which, however, failed suddenly as they came out upon the beach and saw the dark angry sky and the flaws of wind upon the water, swift-moving and almost black as they came skimming across the surface of the bay. They tumbled in, pushed off the heavily laden boat, and bent to their oars.

"See the *Jocasta*," said a sailor, peering backward over his shoulder; "Mr. Brigham seems to be certain she cannot ride the storm at her anchor."

The ship was tossing uneasily at her moorings, and was getting up her foresail for the purpose of necessary flight.

"Here comes the wind," shouted Captain Douglas, who was at the tiller. At almost the same moment, Michael, facing him and pulling the stroke oar, gave an astounded exclamation, while the seaman just back of his shoulder cried out in open terror, "Look, look; the Indians are on us!"

From behind headlands and rocks, from the concealment even of big-rooted stumps and logs at the edge of the water, the canoes came streaming out. How such a number could have remained so completely hidden was impossible to guess. There were no squaws among them now; every flashing paddle was wielded by a brave; every boat had, kneeling in the bow, a fully armed war-

rior with drawn bow. For this they had waited through weeks and months, had bided their time as only Indians can, until there should arise just the situation for which they were looking, wind and storm and a divided crew. Now the great moment had come; now, all around the circle of the bay, echoing back from the rock and slope and forest wall, rose again the hideous, pulsating war whoop. A shower of spears and arrows flew like hail upon the men pulling for their lives toward the ship.

"Michael, take the helm." The captain spoke the words thickly and slipped in a heap to the bottom of the boat. Michael stepped across him, grasped the tiller and brought the staggering boat into the wind, just as she was almost swamped in the trough of the heaving sea. The tempest had broken about them; the wind was roaring and screaming about their ears; fitful gusts of rain were driving over them and, through the squalls, they could see the *Jocasta* rearing and plunging as she tore at her anchor. Very dimly Michael could make out that a small figure in the bow was swinging round the first of her guns. Others were running to join him.

The Indians, however, seemed to make immediate note of the same thing, and plainly by prearranged plan, they strung out in their uneven line of attacking canoes, parallel to the longboat and laying a course which would keep it between them and the ship. If the *Jocasta* were to use her guns, she would be far more likely to slay her own men than any of the wily enemy. A second rain of arrows fell upon them and a seaman amidships dropped his oar and fell sprawling across the thwarts. A yell of triumph went up from the red warriors, and the canoes began to circle close.

"Give me my rifle," Michael directed. His was the only weapon in the party. While the man nearest him



"Here comes the wind," shouted Captain Douglas; while a seaman cried out, "Look, the Indians are on us!"

reached over to steady the tiller, he stood up, swaying with the motion of the boat, hearing the arrows sing past his ears, but taking unhurried aim. A feather-decked warrior was just opposite, leaning far over the bow of his dancing craft, with his bow bent and the arrow drawn to his ear. At the crack of the rifle, the brave uttered a shrill cry and tumbled forward, upsetting the canoe. As a great wave curved down upon it, the small boat and its two warriors vanished.

The swarm of canoes drew away a little, but a second sailor was down and the longboat was being driven off her course and toward the shore. Michael, in desperate haste, fell to reloading his gun.

"See!" cried the man who was holding the tiller. "The *Jocasta*!"

As they came to the top of the wave Michael looked up and involuntarily cried out:

"Ah, good Charles Brigham!"

The mate left in charge, short-handed as he was, and with a part even of the small number of men engaged with the guns had, nevertheless, executed a masterly maneuver. He had slipped his cable, got way upon the ship and rounded in toward shore so that, instead of lying broadside to the longboat and the canoes he was cutting across their bows. The water boiled beneath the *Jocasta's* prow, as in the furious wind she went tearing past them. A flash and a puff of smoke went up from the first gun and then the second. One—two—three—the heavy reports echoed back from the same rocks and slopes where the war whoop had just fallen silent. With every shot a canoe splintered, upended and sank, amid shouts of defiance and rage, while the tumbling waves became dotted suddenly with bobbing heads. Again she shot and again, as she raced forward. The canoes were faltering and dropping astern.

"She'll be ashore," cried the sailor at the tiller. At tremendous speed the *Jocasta* was swinging about, to come into the wind and beat out of danger. But the force of the tempest was too heavy, for at just that instant she came opposite the mouth of the bay where the gale fell upon her with its full fury. Michael saw her lifted high, tilting and staggering, still seeming to struggle back to her safe course, then saw her flung broadside to, upon the bar of the river. She faltered, careened, and was caught by another tremendous sea, huge and combing, a wave "with its feet on the bottom." Even at that distance Michael thought he could hear the rasping sound of her keel scraping upon the gravel, as she caught for a moment and then slid over it into the deeper water of the river. The longboat pulled alongside, as she rocked in calmer waters. The *Jocasta* was over, she was safe, but imprisoned behind the bar. And where was any force to be found that would set her free again?





CHAPTER X

THE TOP OF THE TIDE

The Indians, after brief confusion under Timothy Tripp's gunfire, now rallied boldly and came swarming down upon the *Jocasta* herself, where she swung at anchor in the river, halfway between shore and shore. The crew of the longboat had come over the side, the wounded had been got aboard and the captain carried to his cabin. The arrow had pierced his neck and he was unconscious from loss of blood; but under Michael's first hasty examination and dressing, he seemed not to be mortally wounded. The hurts of the two seamen were more serious.

Timothy Tripp, chief gunner's mate and expert marksman, was in command of the smoking guns, and was loading and firing industriously. He and his comrades were still sending forth a steady succession of round cannon shot, and had sunk half a dozen of the light Indian craft so that the remainder hung in the wind, just beyond reach, furious and afraid. Michael, stopping for a moment beside Tripp, praised his uncannily successful aim which, in spite of the pitching deck, never seemed to miss.

The canoes would advance, then draw off again and hover and dip, out of range, but ready for another onslaught.

"I shall not be satisfied until I have sunk that especial one that my own hands helped to build," snarled Tripp, ramming home a charge, and swinging his piece for a new aim. "I have not yet seen that happy bridegroom that I helped to his bride, the more fool I. Trust me to know him again. I am going to send him to the bottom, if it is the last shot I ever fire."

A deluge of rain now came down, and under its cover, the red warriors seemed to gather for renewed attack. But their losses had weakened their courage as well as their numbers. A handful of canoes did indeed win close to the ship; one came so close that the guns could not reach it, and a single brave came clambering up to thrust his painted countenance streaming with rain over the side, almost directly in Michael's face. The boy caught him and shook him, huge warrior as he was, as though he had been a dead sea otter, then flung him outward to carry down in his headlong fall the fellow who was scrambling up behind him. A very cloudburst of rain came pouring down immediately, stunning and blinding both assailed and assailants. When its fury had eased a little and it was possible to see again, the whole company of Indians was gone.

For two days the *Jocasta* lay in as empty a land as though its red inhabitants had vanished into nonexistence. No one attempted to go ashore; no canoe appeared upon the quiet water. The storm had blown itself out quickly, and the water of their land-locked refuge was glassy quiet. Captain Douglas had regained consciousness, one of the wounded seamen was able to limp about the deck, the other lay in the forecastle, struggling against death. On the third day there was a stir upon the wooded shore, a canoe with two warriors came skimming over to them.

The men held their hands aloft and shouted "Lally," the term which those on the *Jocasta* had come to understand as meaning friend.

They were suffered to come aboard and marched down to the trade room where Michael received them, though with a loaded pistol laid openly upon the table. It was the chief, Wickananish, who drew forth a bundle and laid it upon the table, a thick soft roll of otter pelts.

With unchanging expression Michael opened his store of wampum, measured out the amount of the original price and poured it upon the table.

"Quan-come," he said grimly, having heard those words for "no more" repeated beyond any possibility of forgetting. The Indian pondered, grunted and pushed the furs toward him, gathering up the shell. Trading had begun again.

Negotiations had been renewed but on an ominously different basis.

"Do you notice they bring us no more meat or wapa-too?" Charles Brigham asked Michael, who nodded uneasily.

"We must go ashore to hunt again before long," he said.

When he and Timothy Tripp landed, a few days later, with their rifles in their hands, they were received by a hail of arrows, coming from so many quarters at once that it was impossible to do other than retreat to the waiting boat. Two or three other attempts came to the same end.

"We might land enough armed men to drive the lurking ruffians back," Michael declared, "but what sort of hunting could we do, after fighting a gun battle first?"

Several sallies were made to procure water, but only in openly warlike array with shooting and casualties on both sides. Yet the Indians continued to come out to the ship with furs, evidently feverishly anxious for trade. Since here the wishes of the whites agreed with theirs, the

armed truce and the brisk exchange went on. The red tribes had all possessed plenty of skins hoarded away somewhere, brought out now in astonishing abundance. They never haggled now over the price; but accepted the appointed amount day after day. Slowly the store of furs in the hold approached the desired number. Slowly the supply of shell, beads, tobacco and woolen cloth diminished. Fresh meat ran very low, and it was becoming increasingly hazardous to go for water.

"I cannot see what is the object of their game," said Charles Brigham for the hundredth time. "It seems that they are watching for us to starve and our ship to rot here in the river, as though they were a flock of waiting buzzards."

Michael had been giving the matter his deepest thought and now, finally, produced the opinion which he had reached.

"They are mad for the wampum; you could see that in their eyes from the first minute. Even Indians cannot conceal everything. And now that they realize that we are trapped here behind the bar, they believe that we must stay here forever and fall into their hands at last. Yet they cannot endure to wait for the shell; they will get what they can of it now by trading, and presently, when our numbers are lessened and our supplies and ammunition gone, they will storm our ship again and lay hands on everything they desire. And," he ended bitterly, "their plan may not be so far amiss. The *Jocasta* is a well-found ship, but we cannot live here upon her for unmeasured time."

"Is she to lie and drop to pieces in this cursed river?" exclaimed Charles Brigham. "We will never abide that. We can land our guns and arms and cut our way overland to the *Columbia*."

"The *Columbia* may well have sailed by now," Michael

replied gravely. "We cannot go blundering and seeking her all up and down the coast, with these fiends picking us off from every bush. And would you abandon the *Jocasta* to them?"

"No!" cried Charles Brigham and Michael smiled.

"Nor would I," he agreed.

It began to seem as though the cunning of the savages was to win in the desperate contest of wills. More and more men were wounded in the periodic battles over filling the water casks. Provisions were still fairly plentiful, but, if they could win free, there was still the long voyage across the Pacific to be faced. The captain was recovering, but the first man hurt had died, another was like to do so; three would be crippled for many weeks to come. The prospect of destruction seemed to be creeping closer and closer.

Captain Douglas, once on his feet again, took wise and vigorous command of the situation.

"The first necessity is to see whether the vessel's keel was injured on the bar," he declared, "And after our voyage through tropic waters, the hull should be looked to, in any case."

They found a properly sloping sand bank and careened the ship. They had dismounted the guns and placed them in commanding position to defend themselves and the *Jocasta* against renewed attack. There were one or two skirmishes, but the Indians seemed to have had their fill of cannon fire and preferred to wait rather than to make open assault. It was discovered that the ship showed little trace of that hideous moment of scraping on the bar, that Ephraim Haverall's great oak timbers had stood bravely under the terrific strain. The copper sheathing had been started here and there; but this was readily set right and the hull scraped clean. Then, with the help of current and tide, she was presently got afloat again.

Anxious councils were held in the cabin as to what was to be done next, what measures could be taken to set the vessel free. One quarter had not been thoroughly explored by sounding, a certain channel between a small island and the shore.

"From the way the tide sets in thither at the very flood, there should, perhaps, be better water than we had thought," Charles Brigham said.

When a boat was sent to discover the depth and the current of that narrow, crooked way, it was met by a furious attack from the Indians in force. Even when the next attempt was made in the longboat, with armed men ranged along the gunwale to protect the sailor who hove the lead, the result was only a desperate battle fought between bank and boat with Indians shooting from under cover and at deadly short range. The party came back to the ship without having accomplished its purpose. If another trial must be made, the *Jocasta* must lie in-shore and protect them with her guns. It seemed from the ferocity of the attacks that there might be a chance of escape through the watery byway, but without full knowledge it would be madness to make the attempt.

"To come aground in that narrow space would be to lose the ship," Captain Douglas declared, nor could any one gainsay him.

After this final struggle, even the semblance of truce came to an end. Canoes paddling alongside were ordered away; and a cannon shot emphasized the command. There were enough furs in the hold now to warrant their taking passage for China at last—if they could. There was very little left of the riches which the Indians coveted, but even that little the red men were fiercely determined not to lose by letting their prize escape. No warrior offered to approach the ship again. Instead, as the crew of the *Jocasta* noted, watch fires burned that night on

both banks of the river and, in the daylight, a patrol of canoes was continually paddling back and forth upon the bar. Each time that the *Jocasta* even swung about at her moorings with the tide, there was a cloud of watchers, no longer even troubling to conceal themselves, keeping warily beyond the limit of gunshot, never absent and apparently never sleeping.

Captain Gray had said that Indian activities were seldom great at night, since with their superstitious terror of the spirits of forest and water, the red men were afraid of the dark. The warriors of Wickananish, however, fortified their courage by building huge blazes, and by watching in great companies, for, on this occasion, desire was greater than terror. Sometimes, in the stillness of the midnight watch on board the ship, there would come across the water a weird, slow song, not the sound of a chorus, but of a single voice.

"It is their Medicine Man," Michael divined at last. Timothy Tripp who was on watch with him hung over the rail to listen in the stillness.

"It is, belike, our death song that he is singing," he observed. He grinned like some wrinkled-faced goblin in the light of the ship's lantern. "Let him chant until he is weary. There is a song my guns can sing, which will offer pleasant chorus to his single refrain."

The weather had been wet and chilly, overcast by fogs rolling in from the sea. There was, now, however, a brief respite, a day with warm sunshine and, when evening came, with stars in the eastern sky, although heavy clouds were piled high in the west. Captain Douglas and Charles Brigham were in some discussion below, the murmur of their anxious voices coming up the companionway. Michael and Timothy Tripp were once more together, standing the dogwatch at the hour when faint twilight finally turns to night.

"Is it fog coming in, sir, or why do we not see that watch fire burning on the point?" Timothy Tripp had been aloft and, even from the crosstrees had failed to catch a glimpse of that beacon which, for the last three nights, ever since the fight below the island, had seemed to overlook every movement of the ship with its unwinking red eye.

"I do not even hear the Medicine Man's song," Michael said. "I had thought that perhaps the wind, coming straight downstream, might have failed to carry it to us."

There was, indeed, such a hush over everything as they had not noted for some time. Their ears were trained, by that period of watching and listening, to distinguish the different sounds of the forest; and they could be certain that such soft, steady rustling as they could hear was only the noise of the wind in the trees, and that there was no stirring or movement now, where formerly their enemies had moved to and fro so freely.

"One might almost think that they had all stolen clean away," Timothy Tripp remarked, "but we know well that they will hang here just beyond our reach, until the very end—whatever that end is to be."

Michael leaned forward, listening intently. "Yet I hear something at last," he declared softly. "It almost sounds like dipping paddles that are coming close."

Both of them stood motionless to hearken. It was true indeed that the sound was approaching, the regular soft splash of a steadily wielded blade. The lookout forward came aft to report, "A canoe on the weather bow, sir. Shall we slew around the forward gun?"

"Wait until it comes closer," ordered Michael, "but tell the men to stand by with muskets ready."

It had grown so dark that the boat was only a vague blot, moving like a phantom across the water toward them. The tide was coming in and was running so rapidly

up the river that the Indians had little more to do than to keep their craft headed in the direction of the ship as they drifted rapidly toward the *Jocasta*. A row of anxious faces leaned over the bulwarks to watch them approach.

"They do not even make the pretense of calling out that they are friends," said Tripp. "Shall I fire?"

"No," returned Michael quickly. "Wait. Do you see, there is a woman in the boat."

The canoe had now come under the great shadow of the ship's side and was slipping aft to drop under her stern. Timothy Tripp took up a lantern and held it out beyond the rail so that the light fell downward upon two dark upturned faces. "Ah—ah—," he cried, "I know who you are, the blackest traitor of them all."

The man below stood up, balancing himself easily in the rocking cockleshell and spoke very clearly. "Hanno," he said, and repeated it, his own name, again, "Hanno." With it he added, at last, the word for friend, "Lally." It was he whom Timothy Tripp had helped to fashion his canoe. This woman in the stern, sitting absolutely motionless save for an occasional dip of the paddle to keep the boat in its place, was evidently the bride whom the little sailor had aided him to win.

"Let me go down to him," roared the infuriated Tripp. "A musket ball is not enough; it is with a cutlass that I want to settle my account with the man who made such a fool of me."

"Hush," commanded Michael; "wait to see why they have come. Do you notice that they have no weapons in their hands?"

The woman, slim and young and managing the boat with the ease with which a waterfowl rides upon the ripples, looked up at him gratefully. She could understand not a word of what they were saying, but there was no mistaking the tone of Tripp's indignant fury and of

Michael's stern order to be quiet. The Indian brave was now going through a strange pantomime of which at first they could make nothing. He pointed first toward the little island behind which ran that narrow channel which they had attempted to explore. Then he pointed to the eastward, to a white gleam of light behind the hills which showed where the moon was about to rise. Then he waved his hand toward that spot upon the far point where the watch fire had burned so long but was now quenched. What was he trying to tell them?

Captain Douglas and Charles Brigham, hastily summoned, were also listening and watching beside the rail. The three looked at one another bewildered. No one could divine the meaning of what the Indian was trying to convey. The woman now joined her effort to his. She laid down her paddle and made rippling motions with her hands as though to denote water; she raised them higher and then, like her husband, swung about to point at the moonrise. Michael, clutching the edge of the rail with both hands, leaned over as far as he could, to observe what she was about.

"Do it again," he directed and she, catching the meaning of his order, went through the curious dumb show once more. Suddenly he straightened up with his face lighting.

"She means the tide," he cried to the others, "the high tide of the full moon. They are trying to tell us that perhaps the channel beyond the island is navigable with the water at its greatest height."

He pointed to the island, and the two in the smaller boat cried out together in delight that he began to understand. The man even began to jabber excitedly and once more waved both hands toward where the fire had been, trying to tell them something concerning the watchers on the shore. But the woman did not allow the issue to

be confused; she still kept indicating first the island and then the white eastern sky.

"It might be treachery once again," said Charles Brigham doubtfully; but Captain Douglas wasted no moments on hesitating wonder.

"Up sail," he ordered. There was a confused hurry of running and scrambling feet. The blocks began to creak and groan as the halyards ran through them; the unfurling canvas rustled and slatted in the easy wind as one sail after another spread to the breeze. The two Indians, dropping off a little, sat regarding the still ship springing suddenly into life. The quick slapping ripples which had been running along the *Jocasta's* side ceased suddenly and she began slowly to swing round with the wind. The tide had reached its flood.

The anchor came up with a rush; the ship went winging down the river, came sharply about and began to nose her way into the narrow channel.

"Out with the boats," ordered Captain Douglas, and down dropped every boat into the water, with every oar manned. There was left on board the slenderest crew that ever sailed a ship, only a single seaman beside the captain at the helm, with Timothy Tripp and another gunner at the bow, crouching ready to fire the instant a rustle in the undergrowth should give him a point at which to aim. But there was still silence, utter incomprehensible silence, as they moved slowly along.

"They must be waiting to take us in the narrowest place," thought Michael, touching his rifle which lay between his knees where he sat in the forward boat. But they reached and passed the spot where those on the ship might have stretched out a hand to touch the trees on either side, where the yards had to be swung to permit her to pass. And still they moved forward in the same uncanny quiet.

The wind came near to failing them as they crept forward. Yet it was true, as the Indian, in all good faith, had tried so hard to tell them. By some curious trick of rock and coast line the flood of the highest tide and the force of its ebb set stronger through this constricted way than over the open bar. Every man pulled as though his heart would burst, dragging the ship slowly onward; once she caught and grated, grazing the bottom ever so slightly, but with the heroic efforts of her crew sufficing to drag her free.

"The moon's lifting her," panted the sailor next behind Michael. Above the treetops a great gold bubble was floating higher and higher. The sea was opening before them; there was a last heartbreaking second of scraping hesitation and the *Jocasta* floated clear. Regardless of time or caution or weariness, a great cheer went up from the men resting, exhausted, at their oars. It echoed from the island and from the forested shores; but there came forth no answer from their still enemies. Only, far away, a black dot floated in the white moon path, a canoe containing two tiny figures dwindling out of sight as the *Jocasta* leaned to the wind and rose to the first of the long sea swells.

"Why? Why?" Michael was still marveling over the strange miracle of peace which had let them go free undisturbed. "It may have something to do with the moon," he kept thinking vaguely. He had seen, just as they slipped into the shadowy channel, that the girl had risen in the canoe and was holding up her hands, not toward them, but toward the moon as though in prayer. A mystery the question must, just then, remain; the thought that they were clear again was sufficient to fill every heart.

They dropped down the coast, keeping sharp lookout for the flying colors of the *Columbia*. They found her

after several days of cruising, anchored some distance to the southward of where they had first discovered her. In her cabin, Captains Gray and Kendrick listened with grave faces to the account of the *Jocasta's* trading experience.

"I have heard that the northern bands of Indians are both fiercer and more sullen than those with which we have had to do," Captain Gray said when Michael had finished. "There came word from village to village that you had only touched upon the coast and then stood westward across the 'big water.' That chief Wickananish is assuredly a crafty enemy."

Their own trade had gone peaceably enough but very slowly. The Indians with whom they had been dealing were of a less warlike nation and one more willing to abide by reason in the process of barter and exchange. Captain Kendrick had begun to see that they would not have gathered a cargo before winter and that his wisest course would be to spend the season upon the coast. Amongst the more friendly tribes of that region this was a safe, but tedious prospect.

"So you will clear before we will," Captain Gray said to Michael, "but there is no foreseeing what chances may speed or hinder us both. I will look to greet you perhaps in the roadstead of Whampoa; if not there, we will meet once more when we are all safe home again in New England."

Any knowledge which the keen mind of Captain Gray had gathered was, as before, generously placed at the others' disposal. He had possessed some information concerning the China Sea, and Whampoa, the anchorage where foreign ships must lie when they put into the port of Canton, concerning the Malacca Straits and the passage home, all of which he communicated freely to the officers of the *Jocasta*. When Michael told him of that

strange silence on the night of their departure, he thought for a little before he said:

"It seems to me that I have understood, from these Indians who are our neighbors here, that the night of the full moon is a sacred time to them and that they must not go forth, even against their deadliest enemy, between its rising and setting. That Hanno and his bride were bold indeed to venture against such a belief, and to come out to save you. Such a man as Wickananish, ignorant, suspicious, half a coward and half a crafty knave, would do nothing against the voice of the Medicine Man and his decree of what the gods desired and forbade."

Such of the trade goods as he still had left, Michael was glad to turn over to the *Columbia* and the *Lady Washington*, since the *Jocasta* was anxious to be gone. As he offered the red and blue cloth, he told Captain Gray that, although there was still a little of the wampum remaining, he had sometimes had an impulse to cast it into the sea.

"People say that gold is an evil thing," he observed; "but it is not really the good, clean metal which we must blame, but the greed which causes it to awaken the worst in men's hearts. These shells, which are nothing but children's toys, have the same evil spell upon them."

"I think," returned Captain Gray, "that no one could trade with those Indians of Wickananish's tribe without coming to bloodshed before the affair is ended. Indians are too well accustomed to take what they want by plunder to hold their desires within the bounds of trade. It may be that the trouble was brought on more quickly by the unwonted sight of too much wealth all at once, wealth, so it must have seemed to Wickananish's eyes, that was in the keeping of a handful of men who could not defend it against superior force."

"I felt that I had done wrong in letting him see the

whole of it, the moment I caught sight of the ravenous look in his eyes," Michael lamented bitterly. "What an unwise and costly error it proved to be! Why could I not have known better? Somebody of more worth than I should have had the matter in charge!"

"No man knows the best way, in an undertaking never attempted before," Robert Gray comforted him. "It was not your lack of years and experience which was the cause of your misfortunes; it was the fact that no person has yet any real knowledge of these Indians' minds. You knew better what to do than did we, who brought them rattles and musical instruments! And now, profiting by your experience, we may hope to turn what is left of the wampum into furs without further mischance."

On the morning that the *Jocasta* was ready to weigh anchor for her westward voyage, Captain Gray came aboard to bid them good-by. His eye ran wistfully over the taut, tense beauty of the *Jocasta*. Both the *Columbia* and the *Lady Washington* were old ships, good vessels in their way, but not to compare with this.

"Carry my compliments home to the man who built her," he said. "Let him take an old skipper's word for it that he has done more than well."

All on the *Jocasta* were sorry indeed to see the last of this shrewd, intelligent, generous man who had been so freely willing to give them all possible aid. His last words remained long in Michael's mind.

"In these days of changing conditions and new trade routes, there is no ship which ever sails an uneventful voyage, never a cruise in which a ship is not the sport of wind and weather and a hundred unforeseen chances besides. Pirates are still known in the West Indies; they swarm in the Mediterranean. Pirates, too, in their big square junks and their skimming lorchas will be waiting for you off the coast of China. And there will be reefs

and shoals, typhoons and savages on strange islands—may you have the good luck to win safely past them all. I cannot wish you a voyage without adventure; there is no such thing. But I trust that the most of your chances of the sea will be good, rather than evil. May the adventures awaiting you all have happy ending. May you have more fair weather than foul. You will see both.” Thus the good-bys were said and the *Jocasta* set sail.

The Pacific is a vast ocean. As William Tuttle, the oldest sailor aboard, said to Michael during one of the lengthy talks which an under officer and a member of the crew often have together when the long hours of the night watch are undisturbed, “We have it from Columbus that the world is round, but I think this half of it is further around than the other.”

The *Jocasta*, that infinitely tiny dot on the enormous expanse of blue water, sailed and sailed and sailed and appeared still to be always at the center of the same unchanging circle of sea and sky. It seemed as though she had compassed a tremendous journey when she sighted a bold headland and passed round it into a smooth, palm-surrounded bay of the island which the sailors of that day called Owhyhee.

It was good to partake of the ripe fruits, the fresh pork, potatoes, and yams which the natives, the women for the most part, brought aboard in such abundance, to have plenty of fresh water once more and to see green hills and valleys instead of the endless expanse of blue. The island was always talked of by the few who had visited it as a veritable sailor’s paradise. William Tuttle confessed to Michael:

“I am anxious to be gone from here lest I should begin to wish to stay forever. These smiling women, the smiling waters and the smiling green of the hills seem to soak all the salt out of a man’s bones.”

It was rumored that more than one ship's crew had thought that they were making friends with these supple-limbed, pleasant-faced inhabitants, and had in the end been murdered for the plunder of their vessel. The stay of the *Jocasta* was, however, so brief that no difficulties arose. She stood out from the harbor with a long line of canoes trailing in her wake and, drifting down the wind, the call of a multitude of good-bys in the melodious language of that pleasant isle.

They touched again at a tiny outlying islet in this same group, having passed sufficiently close to see signals of distress flying upon the shore. Three men who had drifted a long and terrible voyage eastward in the small boat of a British merchantman, had here been finally washed up on the coast and were, perhaps, scarcely more safe upon the land than they had been at sea. Their own ship, on a trading voyage for sandalwood to the Fijis, had been wrecked off the Gilbert Islands with all her crew taking safely to the boats, but with these three separated from their comrades and driven afar across the Pacific. A ragged, scarecrow, half-starved trio they were, when the *Jocasta* took them on board.

"The natives have been friendly to us so far, since we had nothing of which they cared to rob us, but—" Thus one of them, Leonard Dunne, told Michael in giving him account of the affair. There was a world of meaning in that "but," all the unlovely legends of the things of which these soft-voiced savages were capable. Not until the tiny island was nearly a thousand miles astern did this knotted old Scotchman, who had followed the sea until he "had memory of nothing else" permit himself a grim joke over how near they had possibly come to gracing the feast of some savage island king.

"I've seen much," he declared in his hard Scotch burr, "and suffered a many things; but there's one end I

could never abide, the thought of fetching up at last in the hands of cannibals."

He was a valuable addition to the crew, for he knew these seas and the long stretch of reefs and islands off the shores of Asia, which were strange to every one else on board. It was he who piloted them into their next port, that of Manila, where the *Jocasta* lay at anchor before a walled Spanish town built on the mud flats under soft, green, tropically wooded hills, and where Michael went ashore to exchange silver dollars for hemp.

"It is pleasant to treat with white men again," Michael declared, although the bargain, concluded with the bright-eyed, gesticulating Spanish merchant, had been a complicated and hard-driven one. It was good, however, to see the straw-roofed sampans scuttling about the ship like water beetles, bringing aboard the first of their cargo of the Orient. This lading accomplished, they were ready to set their course across the China Sea.

They had voyaged, so far, across great empty reaches of ocean where the way was all their own. Adventures they had had, of all sorts, with storms and reefs, and adverse currents, but at least there was no one to dispute their passage. Now they were once more approaching known harbors and long-established markets, and were, as a consequence, coming into dangers of another sort.

"Wherever you have old trade routes, where there is coming and going over courses long laid down, there you will always have pirates," the Scotchman Dunne observed to Michael and the captain. "They swarm about these teeming harbors as rats swarm about a granary. The West Indies have their buccaneers and the Mediterranean its Barbary corsairs, and we all know they are savage and cruel, but they are as babes to these Chinese cutthroats."

"It is only what we must look for," Captain Douglas

said. "We will keep good lookout for this last hazard of our voyage."

The crossing of the China Sea was marked by nothing extraordinary. There was a superabundance of wind which drove them swiftly upon their course, even though it carried away a royal and a topgallant sail. To Michael it was one of the great moments of the whole cruise, when they saw, late one afternoon, a flat shore stretching unbroken for miles to north and south save only where a small, slow-moving river wandered through a maze of little islands and dropped lazily into the sea. Captain Douglas, marking their position on the chart, declared that, given fair weather, they were within only one more day's sail of Macao, at the entrance to the far-sought port of Canton.

They swung about, to skirt the coast northward, but now the wind fell almost completely, so that they beat back and forth all night, making little progress in the faintly stirring airs. When Michael came on deck before dawn he found that they were in even worse case, for a heavy fog hung everywhere, obscuring both land and water, through which the *Jocasta*, jerking and dipping in a choppy swell, every sail and halyard dripping, was fumbling her way blindfold.

"I do not like this," declared Charles Brigham, whom Michael relieved; "the fog and the uneasy sea are bad enough, but I have the disagreeable feeling, somehow, that we are not alone. Listen; do you hear anything?"

Michael stood by the rail, straining his ears to make out whether he did, indeed, hear unwonted sounds or not.

"It seems as though there were a whine and creak of blocks or great oars," he said finally. "But I cannot even make out from which direction it comes."

"It comes from all directions," Charles Brigham declared ominously. "If there is one vessel near us there

are a dozen, though there is no means of knowing what sort of craft they may be. We will soon discover that, however, for unless I mistake me greatly, we are very shortly to have wind. Until it comes, I feel like a person who gropes his way about a dark room, and hears rats that squeal and scuttle in the wall."

He was right in his forecast of the weather. The wind was presently upon them, with a swoop and a bellow, casting the fog aside and showing all too plainly into what company they had fallen. Half a score of junks dotted the sea all about them, high-sided, rounded, rigged with the big, clumsy, matting sails held widespread by battens of bamboo and steered with huge creaking rudders. The wind was flinging them about like straws, so that they tossed and wallowed and could pursue no determined course. Each had a big, round eye painted on her bow, and every one of these great eyes seemed to roll and goggle helplessly as the clumsy vessels strove, like one, to round to in the same direction. There was no mistaking the fact that they were all attempting to close in upon the *Jocasta*.

Captain Douglas came hurrying on deck to issue a hail of orders. Spreading every sail which she could carry without capsizing, the American ship lay over to the wind and went cutting through the water. To outsail these darkly threatening craft was easier for the moment than to stop and give battle. Slowly they drew behind, in spite of all their efforts at pursuit. On one, which attempted too boldly to follow the *Jocasta's* course, the great matting sail carried away and went streaming out from the mast like an umbrella turned inside out by the high wind.

"We have outdone them," cried Michael exultingly, looking back, but on the instant the lookout forward sang out:

"Sail, ho, on the weather bow."

A last wreath of fog had hidden this single outlying junk, larger than any of the rest of the fleet. It came bearing down, whether by accident or design, square across their bows. Captain Douglas swung the *Jocasta* off her course, but to no purpose; wind and driving waves were too great a force and were carrying the two vessels to unavoidable collision.

The captain ordered his men to their battle stations, directed that the ship be cleared and weapons dealt out. Michael, as he ran forward, glanced for an instant over the side to survey the approaching junk. She was not only bigger, but better built than her companions; so that his eye half unconsciously took in details of her carved teakwood rail and ornamented bow. There was, however, no doubt of her calling; she needed to fly no Chinese version of the Jolly Roger to prove what she was. Three men were at the great sweep of a rudder, the others were crowded along the gunwale. A single sight of those half-naked bodies, glistening wet from the fog, the upturned diabolical yellow faces, the long knives ready and the heavy broad-bladed swords, could indicate but one thing. The Scotchman Dunne, examining the priming of a musket, spoke at Michael's elbow.

"There is a pirate crew with but one choice before them—it's either board us or drown."

A second later a shudder and a smashing jar told that the *Jocasta* and the junk had crashed together.



CHAPTER XI

THE COUNTRY OF SCRIMSHAW WORK

The heaving deck of a ship under sail is no proper place for a desperately fought battle. One side may be winning a furiously contested victory, when a sudden plunge to a head sea will tumble the entire fray against the bulwarks so that they arise to renew the combat with the advantage entirely reversed. The crew of the *Jocasta* wielded their cutlasses and muskets, slipped, stumbled, rolled headlong on the slippery planks and leaped to their feet to give battle again. They had the superiority of numbers, but it seemed to avail them little against the ferocity of the murderous attack.

For the first time in his life, Michael met the strength of a man more powerful than himself. In that steely embrace he felt himself almost helpless, as the other held him and strove to free a pinioned right arm to make use of a long, slashing knife. Michael could feel the fellow's heart hammering and could hear his breath coming in sobs, as they trampled and wrestled back and forth, spun about, and blundered into other similarly struggling encounters. The boy's hold kept slipping on the naked, greasy body;



The crew of the Jocasta wielded their cutlasses and muskets against the murderous Chinese pirates.

while he clung to one single purpose, to hold down that arm whose lifting would be his destruction. The report of a musket went off almost in his ear; the great body striving against his, which had been hard and strong as a bull's an instant before, now grew suddenly flabby within his arms. The man sank to the deck; Michael stepped over him and engaged with the next pirate, a small crooked man armed with a clumsy blunderbuss. Above the din of shouting, of stamping and crashing, he could hear the voice of Captain Douglas, issuing his directions as steadily as though he were taking his ship into Branscomb Harbor.

The captain had ordered Tripp, Dunne and others who were known to be good marksmen into the shrouds, where they fired and loaded with cool and careful aim, dropping one pirate after another of those who strove to win their way aft and fall upon the two men who held the wheel. Michael, with old William Tuttle and three others beside him, formed a line across the deck and, after the first bewildering confusion, stood unmoving against one surging onslaught after another. William Tuttle toppled over in a sudden heap, but his comrades closed together and held their defense unbroken.

There was finally a breathing space of battle, another furious assault, then a longer lull and then, suddenly, the unexpected calm of assured victory. Michael looked about him; the deck was covered with limp, huddled forms, some of the pirates were leaping overboard and swimming to the upturned wreck of the junk which now drifted away in the *Jocasta's* wake. A half dozen had suffered themselves to be made prisoners, and were cowering in the bow under the threatening pistols of four of the crew. Charles Brigham, very white-faced, was holding to the shrouds, the blood from a great slash across his chest running down over his coat. Yet he was able to smile delightedly as Michael approached.

"At least there's no harm come to the ship," he said. "The *Jocasta* has not even fallen away a point on her course, and she rides so easily it is plain the crash did her no harm. She should still bring us to Macao before sundown. Are you hurt, Michael?"

Timothy Tripp, with his smoking piece in his hand, came scrambling down from his perch above. Michael felt vaguely of a hot trickle running down the side of his face.

"It's a cut over your eyebrow, sir," said Tripp.

"I thought I heard a rib crack also, when I was in the clutch of that yellow giant," Michael answered. "But neither that nor a scratch on my forehead can do much harm."

He was, indeed, quite unhampered by his hurts and was presently busy taking count of the losses and binding up the wounded. Charles Brigham's injury was the worst of those which had not been fatal. Three of the crew were dead, one of them from the shipwrecked trio picked up near Owhyhee. Old William Tuttle, as Michael came to his side, was near to his end and knew it as clearly as did his superior officer.

"I really wished to stay behind and end my days on that smiling island, as I told you," he gasped out, as the boy sought to aid him. "But this—" he moved his hand feebly to indicate the cumbered deck and the tall, white sails above it, "this is a better place for one to be when he must die. A man must not leave his ship in her need, sir, save when God calls him."

He then fell into unconsciousness and lay for a long time, muttering and smiling a little to himself. He died at sundown, just as a line of rounded hills and green shores told them that they were approaching Macao.

After he had tended the wounds of the crew, Michael, with Timothy Tripp to carry a lantern, went down into the hold where the prisoners had been taken. They were

all of them hurt and bleeding, some of them with injuries that would have been fatal to men of another make.

"Their tough carcasses will endure anything," declared Tripp unsympathetically, as he assisted his superior officer.

One among them seemed, somehow, not exactly of the same sort as the others, a fact apparent even to Michael and Timothy Tripp, to whose unaccustomed eyes all Chinamen, so far, looked much alike. He was smaller than the rest of the great hard-muscled coolies, and his skin was a lighter yellow. Yet he was half-naked like them and his few garments were even, if possible, more ragged than those of his companions. He lay, inert, upon the rough planking, as though badly wounded, yet when they first examined him there seemed no conspicuous evidence of injury.

"That gash across his two shins could not have brought him to such a pass as this," Michael said, looking him over more carefully. "Perhaps the man is shamming, no—look at his hands."

Both of the Chinaman's palms were hideously torn and lacerated, not as any result of the battle just past, but by some former injury which had festered and half healed and then broken open again. With patient care, Michael cleaned and bandaged the gaping sores, while the man, all the while, lay perfectly impassive and un-speaking under his ministrations with scarcely even a sign of life save that his narrow, black eyes were watching every move. Once Michael attempted to ask him a question or two, but the Chinaman only shook his head, signifying that he did not understand.

"He is hot with fever from these wounded hands," Michael said finally. "I think that he is too ill to attempt us further harm, and that it would be better to carry him up into the fresh air."

"It seems a deal of trouble to take for a wretch who is presently to be given to the authorities to have his head chopped off," grumbled Tripp. "Here, sir, I can carry him alone. This is no task for one with cracked bones."

The Chinaman was indeed so small that Timothy lifted him almost without Michael's help, and got him on deck where he was laid upon a mat with the fresh wind blowing over him. Here Michael left him without further attention, for, with Charles Brigham temporarily disabled, there was much labor for one who was second mate as well as the only available substitute for ship's doctor.

It was well past noon, and many miles of sailing had been put behind them, when a Chinese pilot boat ran alongside and a man who looked like no very distant relative of the cutthroats whom they had imprisoned below, came aboard to offer his skill for taking them into the harbor past Macao and thence up the river to Canton. His name, he indicated, was Wong Fu, and though his manners and his appearance were a little more presentable than those of the pirates, his eye for gain seemed almost as unerring. He could speak a very small amount of English; yet this did not prevent a long and complicated negotiation over striking a bargain for his services.

He pulled out a great handful of cash, the jingling Chinese money, each coin with a hole in it, and began laying out piece by piece along the rail. He could not count in English but he made it clear that the number of silver dollars which he wanted was indicated by the number of cash. He kept extending the line to greater and greater lengths in his exorbitant estimate of the value of his talents, while Captain Douglas would shake his head, protesting, and would sweep the coins together to decrease the extravagant amount. At last, apparently satisfied that these bold strangers would take in their ship without him if he haggled longer, he smiled, bowed

deeply, and thus declared the bargain completed. Michael attempted to say something to him of their battle with the pirates, but Wong Fu merely shook his head and, in his stuttering English, tried to tell them that the adventure was most usual, being one of the ordinary dangers of navigating the China Sea.

Mountains crowded down on each side of the deep bay, through which their course now lay, and green islands filled the broad waters of what was really the mouth of the Pearl River. Sometimes the channel was wide enough for the easy running and tacking of the ship, sometimes it was so narrow as to make the most skillful handling necessary if they were to pass without coming to grief.

"It is easy to see where the pirates abide," said Captain Douglas. Any one of the islands, large or small, with their bays and inlets, might have sheltered a whole fleet of the bobbing junks and their cutthroat crews.

They came first to anchor opposite Macao, the Portuguese settlement at the entrance of the river, not in the shallow bay before the town, but in deep waters between two islands a short distance away. The pilot was to remain on board until they reached Canton, and now, having a little leisure after the task of guiding the ship was off his hands, he began to look about the *Jocasta* and to air such scraps of English as he had picked up from British seamen.

Michael asked him whether he had ever heard of the Canton merchant Leung Tsi-pun, and how such a man was to be found when they reached the city. The man answered that the merchant was a great, a very great, gentleman indeed, and that every one knew of him. With some pride he declared that he had, two weeks before, taken Leung Tsi-pun's own junk, with himself on board, out of the river to set forth on a brief journey down

the coast. He had been told to watch for the vessel's return in seven or eight days, but had been disappointed, since it had not yet appeared. The famous merchant must, however, come back at almost any time within the next few days.

Such tidings, imperfectly set forth in the Chinaman's queer jargon, were most unwelcome to Michael who, so near the end of the long journey, was impatient of any delay. He had even resented the pilot's insistence that they remain opposite Macao all night, and not attempt the passage up the river until morning. He was obliged to submit, however, since there was little use in arguing with a man who knew more of the port than he, and who could speak and understand scarcely a dozen words of English. Later he saw Wong Fu, walking about the deck, stop and hold speech with the injured pirate lying beside the forward rail.

"Do all Chinese speak their own language in that excited chatter?" Michael wondered. The talk between the two was brief, however, and presently the pilot strolled indifferently away to examine some new marvel of the ship from America. The *Jocasta* came to rest and darkness stole over them, bringing to all who were not on watch, the profound sleep which is earned by long and arduous toil.

Michael, however, was awake, just at daylight, and was bending over Charles Brigham to examine the present state of his injuries, when he heard a strange low cry directly under the cabin port. The sound was quenched suddenly as though smothered by force, then burst forth again, a quavering call that sounded, even with no intelligible words, like a note of warning. And this time it ended in a sudden lifting cry, like a shriek of pain.

He thrust his head through the port to see a boat gliding swiftly away under the *Jocasta's* stern, her own cut-

ter, yet manned by no crew which had ever pulled her oars before. In an instant he had guessed the truth; the imprisoned pirates had somehow won to freedom, had launched the boat and were stealing away to their friends amongst the islands. A prostrate, struggling figure in the stern told him who had raised that cry of warning. It was he of the injured hands whom Michael and Tripp had carried on deck, the man whom they had called, in their talk of him, "the little pirate."

Michael was on deck in a single leap, and found three of the watch asleep and another lying stunned beside the open hatch below, through which the captives had burst their way to freedom. By some mischance, there had been an ax left under some spare canvas in the hold where the men were imprisoned. They had not only found it, and by its means had broken out of their prison, but they had managed first to cut away a portion of the bulkhead which separated them from the cargo space and had borne away with them as spoils three bales of the precious otter skins.

There was nothing to do but to give chase. Wong Fu, hastily aroused, took charge of guiding the *Jocasta* in the intricate course of pursuit between the islands. Wherever there was a fair reach of water, they would gain greatly upon the fugitives, but in the narrow channels or where some tall, green hill cut off completely the morning wind, the *Jocasta* would falter and the space between ship and boat would widen steadily. The sun came up to find them penetrated far into a labyrinth of small islands, with the escaping prisoners still well in the lead. And now, while the *Jocasta* lay in a round basin of still water, they could see the pirates coolly come to land on a beach of white sand below a huddle of thatched huts.

Wong Fu explained, as best he could, that the fugitives knew that the ship could penetrate no farther and that

they felt themselves to be safe beyond the reach of her guns. When he saw that Captain Douglas was ordering the longboat to be lowered, he protested vehemently with all his English and much Chinese gesticulating besides.

"You cannot know how many murderers are hiding all about, to cut you off from the ship," was the substance of what he seemed to be trying to tell them.

Michael had been looking at the distant beach through the glass and now let the Chinaman peer through it in his turn.

"They seem to be very busy at something," Michael observed, "but I can make nothing of what it is that they are doing."

The pilot, after looking for some minutes, put the glass down and explained, in some repressed excitement which made havoc of his limited English, that the pirates seemed to be building a fire and that he rather thought they were preparing to inflict torture upon some one who lay helpless and apparently bound upon the sand.

"It must be the little pirate," cried Michael and, scarcely waiting for Captain Douglas' final order, he ran to embark in the longboat. As she was pulled steadily toward the beach, half the men were at the oars, the other half with their muskets ready, waiting only for Michael's word to fire. They kept a keen lookout on every side but, by fortunate chance, the pilot's misgivings were unwarranted. That fleet of junks which they had left behind in the fog was probably still cruising off the coast, lying in wait for other merchantmen. If it had happened that the whole flotilla of pirate junks and lorchas had sought its home port that morning, the final event would have been far otherwise.

As the longboat approached, the men from the *Jocasta* could see that those on the shore, reënforced by an equal

number who came running out of the tiny houses, had stopped in their diabolical preparations about the fire, and were watching, apparently in amazement, the rash advance of the Americans. Then they began scurrying about like a nest of busy ants, disappeared in the green undergrowth and were presently visible again, dragging a small, old-fashioned cannon down a long point of sand curving beyond the beach. They placed their gun, which had been salvaged, probably, from some captured English or Portuguese ship, in such a position that the longboat, carried by the current into a narrow channel, would be raked by it at deadly close range. The Americans were close enough now to see clearly how the yellow men were crowding all about their piece of artillery, and how one was even lighting the slow match by which it was to be fired. A certain big fellow who seemed more or less in command was pointing the direction while the others aimed. Timothy Tripp in the bow cried a warning to Michael in the stern:

"With all due respect, sir, I would say that the bull's-eye of their target is to be your red head. It would be wise if you would duck below the gunwale."

"No," cried Michael and a second later shouted the order, "Fire!"

The volley rang out, followed by a shriek and a cry and then by the almost deafening roar of the cannon. The ball went screaming through the air above their heads and splashed in the water a good six cable-lengths away. The pirates, surprised by the deadly accuracy of the Americans' first shots, had fired before they were ready, nor did they have opportunity to load and discharge again. At the second volley they scattered into the bushes and, although a few made bold to run along the shore, and shoot with heavy pistol or musket at the rapidly moving boat, their aim was wild and they did no damage.

The vigorous rowers grounded their bow upon the sand and Timothy Tripp leaped ashore.

The stolen goods lay strewn over the beach. Scattering shots popped out of the bushes and from the houses on the ridge above, but the pirates were no such marksmen as the Americans, and, save for the nicking of the ear of one seaman, no blood was shed.

The bundles of furs were flung into the longboat, the bonds of the helpless man lying on the sand were hastily cut, and he was tumbled in upon them. The men, still waiting at the oars, backed water vigorously and slid their craft off.

They were passing out of the bay more swiftly than they had come in. The big yellow man was attempting to rally his forces about the gun, but only a scant handful had been mustered for a second effort. As a storm of bullets fell pattering in the sand all about them, the pirates retreated again, two of them dropping, but getting up to stumble to cover. The longboat swung free of the point, safe beyond range, and began a steady pull back to the *Jocasta*.

Once aboard, with preparations being made to cast off, Captain Douglas summoned Timothy Tripp to his side. "How would you like to try to drop a ball into that village of thatched houses?" he asked. "I understand from Wong Fu that many a British or Portuguese vessel has ventured thus close and has tried to destroy that nest of robbers, but has never succeeded at such range."

"It is a long shot, sir," replied Tripp, "but it would be meat and drink to me to make a trial."

The morning was so still that the *Jocasta* scarcely rocked in the lee of a green hill. Tripp, with all the crew watching, and with an intent and important face, took studied and precise aim. The first shot fell a little short, but had the effect of bringing out of the houses every

vestige of living inhabitants, squealing pigs, yelping dogs and a last contingent of scurrying human figures. Then every one, on ship or shore, watched with breathless attention as Timothy Tripp prepared to fire again. "Boom—crash!" with the second report the roof of the largest hut fell in, while thatch, splinters and bamboo rafters flew in all directions. Again he fired and again. He was like a small boy demolishing a mud fort; his smile grew broader and broader as each house dropped into a flattened mass of wreckage. When the *Jocasta* hoisted sail and headed for the open bay, there was nothing left behind but a heap of smoking ruins and a forlorn group collected on the beach. Faintly across the water came a shout of what it needed no interpreter to explain were fluent curses cried out in the name of all the gods which watch over the fortunes of pirate Chinamen.

It was time now to make sail for the broad waterway opening beyond Macao, the river upon which Canton was situated, sixty miles upstream. He whom they had all fallen to calling "the little pirate" was confined once more in the hold, although no one knew exactly what should be done with him. His fever seemed to be ebbing; his hands were beginning to heal; his rescuers had come in time to save him from real damage at the hands of his comrades. Whether to regard him as a friend or an enemy was a vexing problem. He had certainly given warning that the prisoners were escaping; but he had just as certainly been one of that murderous attacking band which had sought to take possession of the ship. Michael tried to question him through the pilot, but with no satisfaction.

"I suppose we must simply keep him under guard until we reach Canton," he concluded at last, after debating the matter with Charles Brigham and Captain Douglas. "There we can give him over to some official and beg him to find something to do save behead the fellow."

The *Jocasta* now entered upon the muddy river and was embarked upon as strange a journey as she was ever to make. A great flotilla of sampans came dropping downstream, and, under loudly shouted and incomprehensible orders from the pilot, they made fast to the ship with a great hawser of twisted bamboo and, in long procession, began to tow her. Fifty—a hundred—more than a hundred and fifty Michael counted in that curving, twisting line which wound in and out along the yellow waters of the river, men and women all laboring together at the great sweeps of oars, and all singing some discordant, unintelligible song. Strangely shaped buildings began to show in greater and greater numbers on both banks, tall pagoda towers of temples, great gates of carved stone, wide clusters of tile-roofed dwellings, with gardens and courts all surrounded by a single heavy wall, every roof and gate and tower of utterly fantastic and unaccustomed shape. Timothy Tripp, standing beside Michael in the bow, summed up his impression of the whole impossible landscape.

“Scrimshaw work, that’s what it is, nothing but scrimshaw work!”

Such was the name given to the quaint carvings and intricate, fanciful toys which sailors make during the idle hours of calm weather on long voyages. “The whole of it looks to me,” he insisted, “like something you carry home to put on the chimneypiece and tell the children that they must never touch.”

As they came near to the great city it seemed, after their long months in the sparsely inhabited wilderness or on the empty sea, that so dense a mass of humanity all packed into one place, could scarcely be. The walls and gates and houses began to appear more solid and substantial; but there was still something dreamlike in the carved junks, the flat barges covered with flowers and

vegetables for sale, the countless darting craft of every form and size. What seemed most gloriously real and familiar amid all these extraordinary sights was a line of great, tall-masted ships at the Whampoa anchorage of which three flew the flag of the United States.

It was evening when they came finally to anchor. They had really reached the final destination of their tremendous voyage. Michael, watching the shadows on the water and the darting sampans changing to a swarm of hovering fireflies, tried to tell himself, though he scarcely believed it, that their purpose had actually been accomplished at last. No wonder the old ships of France and Spain saluted with silver trumpets when they dropped anchor in the harbor they had been long seeking. There were silver trumpets blowing in his heart, as he stood there thinking of Nicholas Drury.

He spent the busiest of days from this time onward, in that unfamiliar city which at first seemed to him as pathless and as dangerous a wilderness as the one which he had left behind on the other side of the Pacific. He fell in, however, with Major Samuel Shaw, of Boston town, who had come out to China as supercargo in the first of the American ships and who had remained in Canton to serve the interests of his company. He was a frank, generously kind-hearted man, who immediately set himself to use all of his knowledge and experience in giving aid to the newcomer.

He arranged to send word to the proper officials of the pirate lying captive in the hold of the *Jocasta*. "But you must not expect them to proceed quickly," he warned. "They are slow and careful men, these yellow philosophers, who know nothing of our Western hurry and hustle. Pirates are, to them, neither new or exciting. But they will deal with your fellow in proper time."

He beamed when Michael mentioned the name of

Leung Tsi-pun. "A most fair and upright gentleman," he declared the merchant to be. "I am glad that you have made up your mind to offer your cargo to him. He is most eager in developing trade with our country. Yes, I know that he is not now in Canton; but the servants at his house say that they look for his home-coming at any hour. You must simply send a messenger every day to ask whether he has yet returned."

He introduced Michael to the captains of the other ships, who all expressed wonder and interest concerning the new wares which he brought and the bold route which he had followed. Some shook their heads and looked doubtful over the success of his venture, but there was not one who could not but offer whole-hearted admiration for his ship.

"It will be something to tell at home," declared more than one Briton, "what a vessel from America has accomplished."

Slimmer and more trim than any of the others, the *Jocasta* lay between two bluff-bowed merchantmen of France and England and looked like a bird-of-passage between plump Dorking hens.

Two days of waiting and of setting the vessel in order followed, with every one on board beginning to be anxious and impatient. The changing kaleidoscope of motion and color in the water craft which went past them all day long and which changed to a world of dancing, soft-colored lights at night could not afford them entertainment forever. Boats lay alongside offering to sell them water, fresh pork, rice, vegetables of every sort, roast duck eggs, poisonous looking sweetmeats and opium. One vender drifted by holding up a string of dried and smoked rats and, his wares being emphatically refused, took himself off, muttering darkly against the ignorance of Western barbarians. With all there was to see and hear, and after

such a long voyage, discipline inevitably relaxed somewhat, and more and more men begged for increasing liberty ashore. On the afternoon of the second day, when Michael came on board, after an errand to the countinghouse of Mr. Shaw, he was met by the announcement, "The little pirate has escaped."

It was not surprising, in consideration of how careless the watch had grown, and it was somewhat of a relief, since no one had really known what fate their prisoner actually deserved.

"We seem not very good at keeping pirates when we catch them," he said to Timothy Tripp, "although of all those which have slipped through our fingers, this one probably deserved punishment the least."

He went to sleep that night rather weary, provoked and disheartened over the length of time which had passed with nothing accomplished. Two days more went by while he possessed himself of scant patience; then at last a messenger came, a neatly dressed, soft-spoken lackey with more good manners than English. He had brought the welcome word that Leung Tsi-pun had returned and "humbly hoped for an immediate visit from the honorable gentleman of the Americas."

With his mind too much bent upon the negotiations before him to notice much of the picturesqueness and beauty through which they were passing, Michael accompanied his guide to the house of Leung Tsi-pun. The man suggested that he take a sedan chair, but as this seemed to his unaccustomed view an unmanly method of making progress, he chose to walk. They went through narrow streets with high, blank walls on both sides, although here and there the nodding green of trees or the perfume of blossoms lifted above those solid barriers and hinted of gardens within. Michael had only the confused impression of a gate, a succession of flowering courts

and tile-roofed buildings and other courts, and then, finally, a spacious room with rare rugs and embroideries scattered about it, and no great amount of furniture save a great carved teakwood chair at the far end. A small figure rose and came down the long apartment to meet them, a small man with great dignity of bearing and dressed in all possible gorgeousness of embroidered garments. Michael had taken on his grand manner for this interview, and looked brave and stately in his bright blue coat. All along the way he had been thinking of what he would say, and had been rehearsing various elaborately polite greetings. Yet for once his self-possession left him completely, and he now stood, simply staring as the man came near. It was the little pirate.

The unreadable yellow face of Leung Tsi-pun gave not the least sign of having observed his guest's wonder, or of their having met before that hour. He summoned his interpreter from some adjacent room and began a careful speech of welcome in the most flowery of language. The man who translated was a young Englishman from one of the British trading establishments, who knew some Chinese, an arrangement of far greater benefit to Michael than if the interview had been carried on through a Chinese who aspired to know some English.

Leung Tsi-pun bade him be seated close to his big chair and, by courteous questioning, sought an account of the *Jocasta's* voyage and her purpose in following so unusual a route. Even through the medium of another language, Michael could feel his interest, his keenness of mind and his grave charm. He found himself drawn out in spite of himself, he forgot the curious background of their first acquaintance; he discovered that he was talking freely of their long journey across the Pacific, of the difficulties with the Indians, of the stormy adventure of doubling Cape Horn. And before he had done he was

even relating the history of the *Jocasta's* building, telling, as best he could, of that friend who had wrought so well and whom he had left so far behind.

He had by this time passed well beyond the idea that all Chinamen looked alike. He could even see now that Leung Tsi-pun's immovably polite face warmed a little, that he smiled and put his questions with more eagerness.

"I have chanced to see that vessel lying at Whampoa," he said at last through the Englishman. "There is much talk of her, how fine a ship she is! And from a new country, from the newest country in the world, to the oldest. And a country, you say, where every one, even the poor folk, even the coolies, have voice as to how they shall be ruled. That is something of which I can scarcely get the meaning. But what a voyage! What a beginning of great things! I think that we shall find that each nation has something to give the other."

As he went on to talk of trade in general between the East and the West, Michael began to perceive the vast difference in thought which lay between them. Leung Tsi-pun spoke as though time, immeasurable length of years, was as nothing. He talked of Marco Polo as though he had come to China from Europe scarcely more than a week ago. The Crusades, and their introduction of the Western countries to Eastern taste and luxuries, he discussed as though they had taken place but yesterday. His guest had understood from Major Shaw that talk of immediate business was never introduced into the first interview, so that he gave himself up to listening to the brilliant thoughts of this profound and well-informed Oriental. When he rose to go, it seemed that they had discussed every detail of the *Jocasta's* expedition, every phase of the new and important trade. Only one thing had been omitted. In all of their conversation there had been no mention of pirates.

It was arranged that he should come again in two days' time, and bring his cargo lists. The young Englishman who had done the interpreting escorted him to the outer gate, and, just as Michael was about to depart, he burst out suddenly:

"You can't think how all the French and British captains, how all of us from home are talking of you. We have wondered a great deal over the ships that have come from America by the Cape of Good Hope. But this voyage! And such a ship! We never thought America could do it!"

Michael smiled over his enthusiastic plain speech. "America is just beginning," he said. "We—we hope to win our place in the world and to deserve to hold it."

Under the spell of the Chinese gentleman's slow-spoken dignity and the magnificence of his surroundings, Michael might almost have begun to think that he was mistaken in his idea of who he was, or who he had been. He noticed, however, when they were taking refreshment together, that the man's hands were still bandaged and the nails torn and broken. Yet, if his memory were no error, why had there been no words passed on that surprising matter? He could not wrestle alone with such a vexing mystery and went straight to Major Shaw to lay the whole tale before him.

His American friend listened, pondered, looked amazed and then laughed a little to himself.

"Why did he not tell you who he was? And what was he doing on a pirate ship?" he repeated Michael's questions. "It is plain that his vessel had been captured by the pirates, and he, perhaps, was saved alive to be held for ransom. They must have ill-used him and set him to hard labor; did you not say that his hands were torn? How could one used to the sheltered leisure of a great Manchu gentleman fare when he was set to hauling ropes? When his own ship sank, he must of necessity climb aboard

yours. Did any of you see him actually taking part in the combat?"

"No," Michael recollected. "I never made note of him at all until I saw him among the prisoners. Yet if he was there by accident, he could surely have made clear to us who he was. The pilot, Wong Fu, could even speak a little English. Did that sober-faced rogue recognize Leung Tsi-pun as he lay on deck and never tell us?"

"It is most probable that the merchant thought not even with the help of an interpreter could he have convinced you that he was not what he seemed. And—" here Major Shaw spoke more slowly, "it is not the habit of a Chinese gentleman to beg for favors of any sort, not even mercy or rescue. His dignity would not allow him to ask where he might be disbelieved, any kindness of a Western barbarian, such as even the wisest of these yellow folk still call us. No, he would have felt that he was 'losing face' and that he could not do. He will find some means of showing you his gratitude, but, unless I am much mistaken, he will never mention that adventure as long as you know him."

Major Shaw's surmise was correct. Although, in the interchange of business, Michael came to feel that he had more than ordinary acquaintance with the great Leung Tsi-pun, that brief affair of the pirates was never alluded to in words. The Canton merchant purchased the whole of his cargo. Furs, while not much needed in the warm region of Canton in South China, were greatly in demand among the officials and mandarins and great men of the northern districts, who all came to Canton to buy. It was with the help and advice of Leung Tsi-pun that Michael secured his own cargo for the homeward voyage,—tea, Souchong and Hyson, silk, nankeens, and blue and white dishes. He gave him hints, more valuable than any which even Major Shaw could supply, concerning the gifts

of money which must be distributed amongst customs officials, and how to keep the "cumshaw duty" levied upon the ship, from being too exorbitant. The buying was, with his aid, not only done to the best advantage, but it was carried through with far more expedition than was usual in that land of deliberate proceeding. Before even the French and British vessels which had reached port some weeks before her, the *Jocasta* was once more ready for sea.

On the last day before he was to leave Canton, when Michael sat with his Oriental friend in that luxurious apartment which was the Chinese substitute for a countinghouse, Leung Tsi-pun, through his interpreter, laid a certain proposition before him.

"I do much trading myself, with the Island of Java, with Ceylon and Cipango. Could your friend there at home, of whom I have heard such good things, could he build me a ship like yours, and could you sail her hither? We are beginning to think well of using Western ships for our Eastern trade. For some little time I have had it in mind to purchase one."

Michael eagerly agreed to lay the plan before Nicholas Drury. "I shall see him soon, as time goes with a sea-faring man," he exclaimed exultingly.

Leung Tsi-pun smiled and answered, "How your face lights when you speak of your friend and of your own land. I would that I could see, in my inner mind, what sort of place it is that you call home." When Michael got up and would have said farewell he put the words aside.

"It is my intention to visit your ship to-morrow, before you sail."

Everything was prepared for departure, a full cargo, a ship set in order for sea to the last touch of tarring, scraping and varnishing. Michael had left elaborate messages with both Major Shaw and Leung Tsi-pun con-

cerning the future arrival of the *Columbia*, recommending to their good offices both Captain Gray and Captain Kendrick.

There had been only one great disappointment. Charles Brigham, who had recovered safely from his wound was, nevertheless, to go home on another vessel. Two weeks before, a Salem ship had crawled into the anchorage in dire distress, having lost on the outward voyage all her officers but the captain, and nearly half her crew, from ship's fever. Her commander was a great friend of Brigham's and was in such difficulties over manning his vessel for the return cruise that the *Jocasta's* mate could not refuse him aid. Very reluctantly he had agreed to go back with him.

"It is plain to all of you how I must feel over leaving the *Jocasta*" he said simply, when he laid the matter before his own commanding officer, "but here is Michael able to fill my place quite as well as I could, and here is an American captain apt to lose his vessel for having to take her home short-handed. There is never another mate to be got in such a far port as this; and a seaman cannot turn his back upon a comrade in his desperate need. I can ship again on the *Jocasta* when we all come home."

It was, therefore, so arranged, with Michael to be first officer and the shipwrecked Leonard Dunne to be the second. It was the actual day that they were to sail; and Leung Tsi-pun's barge, an unbelievably decorated craft, carved all over with flowers, and with gayly dressed coolies at the oars, drew alongside. Her owner came on board, and after him were hoisted various chests and bales wrapped in matting. These, he indicated briefly, as they were opened, were some small remembrances for his good friends the Americans. There were soft rugs, all bright with birds and flowers; there were

porcelain and bronze bowls; there was a jade cup rimmed with silver and carved with the likeness of a junk under full sail. This last was to be taken home to Nicholas Drury "who has made so fair a ship." There was a big lacquered box, a Chinese dower chest "to be carried to that one of the women of your city who gave the most of her marriage portion for your cargo." How Henrietta Sparrow would open her eyes at the sight of those embroidered linens and silks which were to be hers! How Timothy Tripp laughed and chuckled with delight over bearing it home to her. When all the gifts had been designated, Leung Tsi-pun walked a little aside with his red-haired friend and after brief silence bade the interpreter approach to say for him:

"I understand that you have not yet taken any wives, back there in your own land." How he had gathered this knowledge would be difficult to explain, for he had never asked Michael questions on private matters, that being unpardonable in the code of Chinese politeness. He spoke hesitatingly now, as though treading on delicate ground. "When you do choose a woman, this is for her."

He put into Michael's hands a package somewhat smaller than the rest, wrapped in dark brocade and tied with intricate and graceful knots of red silk cord. With what excitement Dolly Drury would open it, Michael thought. His mind had instantly leaped half round the world to the thought of her.

The great Chinese gentleman now motioned his interpreter away. As he stood with Michael, all alone in the stern of the *Jocasta*, he made his single effort at speaking English, bringing out the laborious words which, perhaps, he had learned for just that occasion. It seemed that, after all, he was to refer, once, to that sacredly private bond which lay between them.

"Velly careful, no meet pirates!" He smiled an in-

stant's radiant, glorious smile, then turned about with his accustomed face of unshakable dignity. It was time for him to go ashore.

The *Jocasta* dropped down the river, threaded the island-dotted bay in safety and stood out, with a steady wind, into the China Sea. As she swung along, every singing stay and halyard, every rustling sail seemed to speak aloud the same message. "Homeward bound!"

For two days they had followed the coast of China southward without event; then came the first mishap. Captain Douglas, who had been looking flushed and ill for the whole of a morning, came on deck, and gave a few orders. He was evidently sick, but trying to keep up his duties in the face of the approaching bad weather promised by a sudden, uneasy hush on the water and by a lowering sky. Yet in the midst of his directions he broke off.

"Michael, I am done," he said abruptly. "I—I don't know quite where I am." His words grew confused, as with Michael's help he walked unsteadily toward the companionway. "Not—fit to be in charge of a ship—you take her. But remember—glass—falling—wind is coming."

His comrade got him into his bunk, greatly disturbed over the evidences of mounting illness. Here was some contagion picked up on the quays of Canton. It was simple enough, but what a disaster! Having done what he could for his commander, in desperate haste Michael hurried back on deck. Dunne was waiting for him at the companion.

"The blow is coming, sir. I have been stowing everything."

"Very good, Dunne, send another man to hold the wheel." Michael took one look at the tumbling clouds over head, at the dark rising sea. He gave a few further orders, then strode back to stand close to the helm.

"It is not the best of luck," he said bitterly to himself, "to have the moment that you take command of your first ship be three breaths before the breaking of a typhoon."

An instant later and the blinding, yelling storm was upon them. The *Jocasta* reeled and staggered as it struck her, lay over upon her side almost to the point of capsizing, every part of her groaning and crying aloud like a living creature in pain. The force of the wind and of the scourging rain seemed beyond what ship or man could endure, yet both were steadily increasing. As he gave his steady orders, as he directed the men fighting with the bucking wheel, certain words formed themselves so vividly in Michael's heart that it seemed he was speaking them aloud.

"Nicholas, if by chance I do not bring back your ship to you, will you know that I did the best that lay within me?"





CHAPTER XII

GUNFIRE

In the matter over which Michael had been feeling the most concern for his friend, his cares had been heedless. All else seemed to have gone against Nicholas Drury; only one thing remained to stay and steady him. The people of Branscomb still stood firmly behind him. There had been no voice raised of complaint or reproach to torment further his already tortured spirit.

Perhaps within some of those little, low-roofed cottages along the water side, some good wife, as she was putting the children to bed, would murmur a little to her man, "If things had not gone so ill. If the *Jocasta*——" But her husband would only shake his head and say, "Good or bad fortune, the sea knows how to bring them both. Speak no ill of Nicholas Drury. If it were not for him, there would not even be a roof above our heads."

Women talking together on the street corners, sometimes with voices querulous or sorrowful, would fall into silence when Nicholas Drury chanced to walk past them, and one would say to another after he was gone, "He

carries courage upon his face, but it is plain to see, none the less, that the lad's heart is near to breaking."

As he came trudging homeward along Branscomb Head on that morning after the burning of the brig, *Betsey*, Nicholas, when he came close, could see the harbor alive with small boats, which, since long before daylight, had been searching the rocky shore for him. Old John Ewing, who had been badly burned about the hands and face when he first discovered the fire and attempted to quench the uncontrollable flames, had refused to be taken home until he could be certain "what had happened to Master Nicholas." Great was the rejoicing when it was found that the fire had spared him and that he was safe.

The *Betsey*, wedged between two boulders just inside the point, had burned to the water's edge, with such damage within that even her stout hull offered no hope for salvage. Lest she drift out into the tideway, Nicholas gave orders that she should be broken up where she lay.

"She will make good firewood, at least," he commented grimly within himself. "The blaze which her timbers would kindle might serve to warm one heart at least, or maybe two. How Darius Corland and Joseph Ryall would love to spread their hands to that welcome fire!"

He had completed this task three days after the loss of the little brig, and had walked home to the Blackbird Inn, slowly turning over in his thoughts the problem of what was to be done next. He had girded himself to face the future with courage; and he would do so, even though the days before him looked an utter blank. Yet his spent mind could not compass any plan as he now struggled and pondered and wrestled with the question, sitting beside the window in the little room which looked upon the garden.

Summer had not yet yielded to the coolness of early autumn, and the brilliant night was hot, with the moon

sailing majestically through the schools of little clouds which played about her course like darting silver fish. Black rounds of shadow lay below the plum trees, but the open spaces between them, where the dew had beaded the grass, were as white in the moonlight as though overlaid with hoar frost. Nicholas got up to stand at the open window, resting his elbow against the frame, and looking out with scarcely seeing eyes while he went over and over again that harshly demanding question, "What next? What next?"

Very slowly his half-conscious attention began to be caught by a certain small but curious detail visible in the garden outside. The smooth glitter of moonbright dew was broken here and there, in regular succession, as by footsteps reaching up through the garden from the Marsh Road. He looked again, and yet again; there could be no mistaking. Here once more was that same line of footprints coming up from the sea. Hoar frost and dew, moonlight and morning had passed a hundred times since; but before his eyes at last was that same record of some one stealing past the marsh and slipping through the garden amongst the plum trees. As he leaned out through the window to look more carefully, he was aware of a low sound almost at his elbow. In the black shadow at the angle of a jutting chimney, some one was standing concealed, some one who was watching him and now was laughing.

"Etienne," he cried, and with the word was out into the garden.

"I have been watching you this half hour long," said that gay, well-remembered voice. "I landed in the cove, just where I took leave of you, and came up by the way I followed before, not knowing just what friends of yours might be lodging in the inn, and who might be more than pleasantly anxious to see Etienne Bardeau."

"Come in, come in; there is no one here to molest you," Nicholas urged and brought the wanderer inside. When they were within the circle of candlelight, the Frenchman gave Nicholas one searching glance and cried out:

"Saints of Heaven, my dear, dear friend, what trouble has come to you? And where is Michael Slade?"

"I—I had hoped you might have brought me news of him," stammered Nicholas. He drew forth a chair and, sitting down beside his friend, poured out to him the whole tale of what had come and gone since their meeting. Etienne listened with grave eyes upon the boy's face, his expression never changing from the beginning of the story to the end. Michael, Darius Corland, Hezekiah Truman and his tall companion, the *Jocasta* and the *Betsey*, he heard in full about them all.

"And no tidings have ever come back to you of the *Jocasta* after she sailed away?" he asked, when Nicholas finally had done.

"One letter from the West Indies, which said that another would follow it so soon as a second northbound ship was to be found," the boy answered. "And you, in all those places where you have been, have you not chanced even to hear any one speak of her?"

Etienne slowly shook his head.

"I have been in many ports, on our side of the Atlantic—the Baltic, the Mediterranean, England and Spain, I have visited them all in these two years and nowhere have I heard even the mention of her name."

There was quiet while Nicholas, with silent struggle, accepted this stifling of his last hope.

"So be it," he said finally and got up from his chair. "A long-looked-for friend must sup before he talks of anything more. Shall I bring you in a fine, tall, brimming tankard of home-brewed ale?"

The unhappy gravity of Etienne's face broke into the

radiance of laughter as he replied, "Whatever has been lost, there is still here the bravest heart which I have ever known. Craving your pardon, most hospitable monsieur, I will not drink ale to-night; but you will find me a veritable rival of our French giant Gargantua in the consumption of bread and cheese."

Nicholas' hasty explanation in the kitchen may not have conveyed much to Phoebe and Dolly; but it put them upon their mettle, none the less, to set before his mysterious friend the very best which the inn afforded. Dolly brought it in to the table in the little room. Cynical Joseph Ryall had compared her manner to a duchess-in-waiting; but this evening her manner had the stateliness of Queen Elizabeth, spiced strangely with that sparkling smile which savored of a peering hamadryad in a wood. She and Etienne crossed glances, exchanged a word or two upon Nicholas' introduction, and three moments afterward were in the lively conversation of well-established friends.

Even before her the Frenchman spoke plainly of his hopes and plans. "We who have thought to help France forward toward her liberty," he said, "are now striving with all our strength to hold her back a little from the headlong course into which she is about to throw herself. Old and terrible abuses will have, I fear, only terrible remedies, in which innocent will suffer as well as guilty. We have not the cool heads of Anglo-Saxons, and between high and low we have given and received unspeakable wrong."

When Dolly had gone, and when Etienne had almost consumed the supper which, so he said, "King Louis XVI would have been glad to sit down to that night," he suddenly put aside his talk of great affairs and said abruptly:

"There is a special matter of which I must speak

before further time passes. It has to do with that man for whom the name of Hezekiah Truman is as good as any other. Has it occurred to you that it was his hand which set fire to your little ship *Betsey*?"

"I have had small doubt of it," answered Nicholas heavily, "but I have not yet thought of what steps I should take in the matter. And I have wished also to speak of this letter of Darius Corland's which I have guarded so long. It has been of great service to me in making me feel that he is not a man for awe and fear as I, like every one else, had once thought him. But beyond that, it has no usefulness in my hands. I should be glad to be rid of it."

He went back to give his friend a somewhat more detailed account of Darius Corland's efforts to reclaim his property, of the hired assaults, the pleadings at last, the final threats, and those significant words of John Ewing concerning the fire on the brig. "It just burst forth suddenly, as it might be a volcano within her."

"It all agrees with certain things which I also have heard," declared Etienne. "You will remember that this Hezekiah calls himself, in his own crooked way, a friend of mine. This is not the first time, since my ship put into your harbor last night, that I have come ashore. I did not care to show my face in the Branscomb market place again; for that might have led to inconvenience and delay, if nothing worse. It was so late when we cast anchor that I did not believe I would find you awake, even if I came to seek you. Yet I was in such haste for tidings concerning you that I slipped ashore hard upon midnight and visited one of those small taverns at the waterside where the candles burn all night long. It chanced that I there fell in with our common acquaintance, Monsieur Hezekiah, and was by him introduced to his long companion who passes by the name of Travers. Hezekiah thinks

that he has some common bond with me. It happens that he knows that I, like him, go about the world with a surname which is not my own."

"But your purposes are not quite the same," smiled Nicholas.

"Not precisely, but that, Hezekiah does not quite grasp. He made me one of their party in the most friendly manner. Though I did not hear any of the news of you which I had been seeking, I heard a great confusion of facts spilled abroad, some of which I thought I could connect with your affairs. The man Travers was less profuse in his communications; but he was possessed by the blackest and most deadly rage which I have ever witnessed. They have both come into complete discord with their former employer. Hezekiah has fallen in and out with him a baker's dozen of times; but now he declares that he is done forever with serving so mean a master. It seems that there is no established schedule of payment for setting fire to ships, and that he and Darius have disagreed sadly over the question of what it is worth."

Nicholas chuckled in appreciative understanding. "They are an ill-assorted crew," he observed. "I had already gathered that all has not gone peaceably amongst the three of them."

"I think that now the ill will on all sides has been wrought to dangerous pitch," Etienne went on. "I, for myself, would little like to be the object of such enmity as that tall, lantern-jawed devil was professing for Monsieur Darius. They both said that it was their purpose to visit him to-night at his house beyond the town to demand a reckoning. I have thought that you and I also, Nicholas, might take our way thither and make final arrangement with Monsieur Corland in this matter of the letter. I would that we could force him to make restitution for the loss of the *Betsey*."

"I will never take money from him," Nicholas declared stoutly. "Moreover, we should have to prove his share in the destruction of the brig. To do that, we would need the help of Hezekiah Truman and with him I will have no more to do."

"There you are most wise," Etienne agreed. "But at least this is an excellent occasion for us to present ourselves and our business before Monsieur Corland. Hezekiah is too firm a friend of mine to do harm to us at Darius' bidding, and while that rascal and his comrade rogue are there, Monsieur Corland would never dare to set the watch upon me. He could not even summon that gentle constable who sat so comfortably for half an hour below me in good gray Dobbin's shed."

This was a plan to which Nicholas agreed most readily. He was anxious to be rid of the letter by any means, and could scarcely wait for a moment's delay, now that the way was finally open. He ran out to saddle the gray horse for Etienne, and to recover the letter from its dusty hiding place. He procured another mount in the village and in scarcely more than half an hour the two were clattering down the moonlit road toward the big house two miles away. It was there that Thomas Drury had lived and there Nicholas and Dolly had been brought up; but it was the abode now of Darius Corland.

Nicholas was not an unskillful rider, but he made no such figure upon his borrowed mount as did the erect and graceful Etienne Bardeau. More than once the boy, glancing at his companion upon the jogging Dobbin, thought that, in his rough sailor's coat, with his cutlass girded at his side, the Frenchman looked like some great lord, who should have been equipped with a silver-hilted sword and with a high-stepping, blooded charger. The moonlit road was quite empty of travel, in spite of the warmth and beauty of the clear night. Once as they mounted to the

top of a hill they seemed to see a pair of moving dots toiling along the way before them which disappeared from sight as the two dropped down to the valley of a stream.

They reached, finally, the entrance of the big, pillared house, standing back from the road at the head of an avenue of trees. How curious it seemed to be rapping for admission at the door of that dwelling which Nicholas still thought of as home. He thumped the shining knocker, waited a little, then struck sharply again.

"It is strange that no one answers," he said to Etienne. "There are lights in the windows, and I thought that I heard voices as we came up the drive."

The paneled door itself was standing slightly ajar; so that finally he pushed it open and they both went in. There were candles burning on the table in the hall; others, in sconces on the wall, lighted the broad mahogany-railed staircase which led upward before them. There was no sign of any person, servant or master, in the big quiet house. Now and then an unexplained sound of thumping came up from some region below, and faintly, down the stair, floated a vague murmuring of voices.

"Mr. Corland must be in my uncle's study at the head of the stairs," Nicholas said and led the way upward. The sound grew louder as they mounted, not from their approaching nearer, but from the rising of the voices in excitement or anger. Finally as they reached the last step, there came a great bellow of rage, then an instant's silence followed by a man's cry, high-pitched, almost a scream, of pain. Nicholas was across the hallway in one stride but, with his hand upon the door, he heard the bolt shoot inside.

He struck fiercely against it, but knew well that there was little hope of breaking in that solid oak portal.

"The inner room," he cried to Etienne and raced down the hall, darted in at the first opening, flew through a

bedchamber and flung open the smaller door which gave upon the study. He was not a second too soon, for, as he plunged over the threshold, he flung aside a short, square man who was striving to slam the door and turn the lock. Just as he won his way inside, with Etienne at his back, there came a great crashing of glass and the thud of a heavy body thrown violently against the wall. The man before him gave over, at once, his struggle to lock the door and spun about to fling himself again into the struggle which he had left for a single instant.

The four-branched candlestick upon the table had been overturned and lay upon the floor, sputtering but still burning; another still stood upon the mantel and showed Darius Corland, crowded into the corner beside the tall window, helpless in the hands of Tom Travers and Hezekiah.

They had not assailed him with knife or pistol, they were beating him, smiting him with one terrific blow after another, pounding him backward against the panels, then shaking him back and forth as though he were a great inert sack of grain. Somebody's shoulder had been thrust through the window and the falling glass had cut them all; Darius' face was running blood, Hezekiah's cheek was scored, there was a great gash across the knuckles of the long hand with which Tom Travers clutched his enemy's throat. Nearer the door, limp and senseless, lay Joseph Ryall, sprawling along the wall just where the two had tossed him aside before they fell upon Darius.

"Hold," ordered Etienne. "Would you kill the man?"

"Yes," roared Tom Travers. "That is what we would do, exactly that. Not easily, mercifully, with a bullet or a sword but thus—and thus—and thus."

With each of the last words he swung the great body against the solid wall, as easily as a furious hound will shake and toss a captured woodchuck. The two were,

indeed, like a pair of fierce dogs, who, after growling, sullen, ill-treated service, had of a sudden turned to rend their master.

"He hired me for crime and treason," panted out Tom Travers again, "then laughed at me and told me that he would give me up to the law; said that he held my life in his hand. I'll show him who holds life and death here. I will show him again—and again—and again."

Once more he fell to raining blows upon the scarcely struggling victim whom the two held between them.

Etienne whipped out his sword.

"We will not see murder done," he cried. There was a flash of steel and a yell of pain from Travers, as he released his hold upon Darius Corland's throat and stepped back, clapping his hand to his arm. At the same moment, Nicholas crooked a steel-taut elbow about the neck of the struggling Hezekiah and jerked him backwards. Darius Corland, released, sank against the wall, then slumped, slowly and heavily, first to his knees, then into a heap upon the floor. Etienne swung about upon Hezekiah, still wrestling and writhing in the grasp of Nicholas.

"Get you gone from here," he commanded, giving the man a name which the boy had never heard before. "You have called yourself my friend, but from this hour you may use that word no more. Let me never look upon your face again."

Hezekiah stayed not to protest. The instant Nicholas' arm had released him, he was out through the door and down the stairs. The front door slammed with an echoing crash behind his flight.

Tom Travers stood leaning against the mantel, gasping out curses, trying vainly to lift his disabled right arm. The blood dripped from his sleeve upon the white stone hearth.

"For you," said Etienne Bardeau, "you may have either the sword or the gallows. Shall I, or the hangman, perform the very necessary duty of killing you?"

The tall man regarded him with a strange snarling smile; then of a sudden threw back his head with a great shout of hoarse laughter. He reached up with his left hand, caught the candlestick and hurled it in the Frenchman's face. The lights went out, and in the darkness, Nicholas heard the sound of scuffling feet, a smothered cry from Etienne, then the banging of the door. Travers also was gone.

A wildly hammering heart, clumsily hasty fingers and a flint and steel, all taken together, do not make for haste in the relighting of a candle. Nicholas was still fumbling vainly in the dark when a hand tried the door from the hall; then a glimmer of light came through the bedchamber and a disheveled manservant appeared upon the inner threshold. In one hand he held a candlestick, in the other a big, wavering horse pistol.

"Good Heaven, Mr. Drury," he exclaimed in delighted relief at recognizing Nicholas. "What has happened? Have they slain the master?"

It was indeed a horrifying sight which the candle revealed to his eyes—the wrecked room, the smashed windows, two men upon the floor and a third, a stranger, who sat upon a chair holding a bleeding shoulder and who now addressed him curtly:

"Put up your weapon, man, we have had enough of peril for one night. How is it you did not come sooner to your master's aid?" And to Nicholas, Etienne added, "Do not look so alarmed. The fellow struck at me with a knife under cover of the darkness, but it was an awkward blow with his left hand, and made no more than a bloody slash which is of little consequence."

The serving man laid down his pistol upon the table,

evidently glad to be rid of it. He explained as he moved back and forth, picking up and relighting the candles:

"We were all in the servants' hall when those two ruffians came in, blunderbuss in hand, forced us down into the cellars and turned the locks upon us. The windows below are barred, and it was all this time before I could force the door. The others are still afraid to come up."

Nicholas was about to tear away the sleeve of Etienne's coat and shirt to examine the knife wound, but the Frenchman motioned him toward Darius Corland.

"It is not I, but that one who is in extremity."

The serving man and Nicholas, between them, managed to lift Darius from the floor and lay him upon a couch. His face was mottled with purple and his breath came only at intervals, and in great gasps. Nicholas sent the man for water, for linen to bandage Etienne's shoulder and directed, "Have one of the others saddle and ride into Branscomb at once to fetch the doctor."

Half an hour of intense labor followed. More helpers came venturing timidly up the stairs. Etienne's hurt was tended and bound up. Joseph Ryall, who proved to be stunned but otherwise not greatly harmed, was carried away into another room to be cared for by the housekeeper. Such aid as Nicholas and Etienne could offer, pending the doctor's arrival, they administered to Darius. His breath was coming with such a struggle that presently Etienne said, "He would be better if he were sitting."

They lifted him into his big armchair, where he did indeed seem to breathe easier. His eyes opened briefly and he made a feeble movement of his hand to indicate that they had given him relief. Sending the man away on some further errand, Etienne closed the door after him and came to stand before the helpless man in the chair.

"The doctor will be here now, in not many minutes,"

he began, "and Monsieur Drury and I will leave you in sufficiently able hands. But before he comes, we will first conclude that small matter of business which brought us here. Are you able to understand what I say?"

Darius opened his eyes and closed them again as signal that he did. Etienne stepped nearer.

"You have been guilty of treason against that country of which you pretend to be a citizen, Darius Corland. Other men, for lesser offense, have forfeited their estates and have been banished from these colonies. To recover the proof of your wrongdoing, you have been willing to connive at anything, even murder; you have contrived the destruction of a ship in your final effort to overthrow the Drury fortunes. Of these things you would, in your ordinary health, make blustering denial; but I think that you are now come to such a pass that you will not attempt to withstand the truth."

He paused for a moment, not for any answer, but to give time for the man in the chair to take in all that he had said. Then he proceeded:

"When you are recovered, as I do not doubt you presently will be, you are to dispose of your estates as best pleases you and you are to take passage for England, where you are to abide. You are to lay upon yourself that sentence of banishment which, if your wrongdoing were known, the State would lay upon you. Should you fail to do this, in proper time, there shall be means found of forcing you. Those two men who visited you this night would give excellent testimony in the witness box, is it not so? You will not, for a time, be the great man, in another country, that you have been here. But humans are somewhat like sheep the world over, and at last, I have no doubt, you will have shouldered your way into something like your old place of command. You will inspire awe in a few, and dislike in all. But from

Branscomb, from Massachusetts, from the United States, you must and shall go. Do you comprehend? Do you agree?"

There was a long pause. Darius' eyes were staring open now as he looked desperately, first at Etienne, then at Nicholas. At last he bowed his head very slightly, the struggling ghost of a nod.

"Then," said Etienne, "that matter being concluded, there is a certain thing which we will do for you. Nicholas, the letter."

The boy drew out the missive which he had guarded and hated for so long. Etienne laid it carefully upon the bricks of the fireplace between the andirons. He took up a candle from the table and set the flame to the paper. The letter curled, shriveled and crumpled, and in a moment was a tiny heap of gray ashes.

"It does not burn as the *Betsey* did," observed Etienne bitterly, "for those flames destroyed a brave and splendid hope, and these, only the small, mean evidence of a coward's evil doing. But the fire in both cases has done its work. And now since I hear galloping horses on the road outside, we are free to take our leave. I bid you a long, a very long farewell, Monsieur Darius Corland."

Next morning all of Branscomb was buzzing with the story of how robbers, tempted by Mr. Darius Corland's reputed wealth, had broken into his house and had well-nigh murdered both him and his good friend, Mr. Joseph Ryall. If it had not been that Master Nicholas Drury, with a companion, chanced to arrive at the house at a fortunate moment, the villains would undoubtedly have made an end of that worthy and prominent citizen.

Since there was no danger now that Darius Corland would move against Etienne Bardeau, he had settled down to remain at the inn for a little, until his shoulder should be somewhat healed and until his ship, which

was to go on to Halifax, should return and pick him up on her homeward voyage. The Blackbird Inn experienced an unusual amount of custom that day; for all who could find excuse came hastening thither, hoping to catch a glimpse of the foreign gentleman who had been the hero of the occasion and whose ready sword had wounded at least one of the murderers. A very few lucky ones managed to get speech with Etienne and heard from him a tale at which Nicholas marveled as he stood by. All the details of the attack and struggle were so freely set forth, that no one, save himself, noted the absence of any real explanation why Nicholas or the Frenchman or even the two rascals, Tom Travers and Hezekiah Truman, came to be there.

A few other townsfolk, less fortunate but still in better chance than the rest of the village, managed to observe Etienne, later in the afternoon, sitting in the garden under the plum trees, playing at chess with Thomas Drury. Dolly was standing beside the Frenchman, who was keeping his two companions in a continual gale of laughter by his lively talk. He looked pale and interesting and carried his arm in a sling, so that those who merely saw him professed themselves quite as satisfied as though they had contrived to hold speech with him. If any of them recognized the stranger whom they had pursued through the market place at Darius Corland's command, for the sake of the price upon his head, they forbore to revive a disagreeable subject. No one who had taken part in that affair looked upon the memory as an occasion reflecting much credit upon himself.

Nicholas, restless and disturbed by the coming and going, by the questioning and marveling, had taken himself away. He had gone to inquire concerning the progress of John Ewing and his burned hands. His own scorched arm, bandaged by Dolly, gave him enough pain

to make him even more unable to remain quiet. Ewing's customary lodging was in a cottage at the upper end of the village whither Nicholas made his way, through the crooked street which skirted the edge of the town, meeting few people and allowing himself to be stopped and questioned by none. When he reached the house he learned that the sailor had moved, for better care, to the dwelling of his married daughter, a farmhouse a mile distant from Branscomb on the narrow unused road which led out into the "back country."

In the hot stillness of the drowsy afternoon, Nicholas tramped along the quiet way. The sunshine was thick and yellow as it is only after the long heat of summer when dust hangs everywhere in the air. He could see its full round shafts striking down through the trees which crowded the roadside, as he took his way down through a hollow, crossed a little bridge, mounted the brief incline and knocked at Dame Margaret Pearson's door.

John Ewing, brown, hard and seasoned by a life of arduous toil, looked very much out of place sitting in the wooden chair among pillows, beside the honeysuckle-hung window. Evidently he was in much pain, of which he made very light, and was overjoyed to see Nicholas and grateful for his coming. They spent a pleasant hour together in the cheerful talk of men absorbed in the same trade. Dame Pearson, coming in with a plump baby on her arm, smiled at their incomprehensible jargon of steeving of bowsprits, of shrouds and ratlines, of what was to be expected of bluff-bowed vessels in heavy weather. She set milk and honey cakes before the distinguished guest and observed that "Father looks already the better for talking a bit about ships."

The old shipwright had wandered at last into a lengthy yarn concerning a vessel which had foundered off the Isle of May because of imperfect building. "Never an

honest plank laid in her, never a true line in her anywhere, never a good full blow struck, sir, from the laying of the keel and the pinning of the garboard strakes to the setting of her mizzen topmast. It was no wonder she went down!" Shadows lengthening on the window sill warned Nicholas that it was time to be gone. He arose, with some last words of good wishes and hopes that the burns would soon be healed.

The old workman looked at him with pathetic, hungry eyes. "I would I could keep you here for a dozen hours longer," he said. "It is slow work sitting idle and wondering when I can feel a good maul handle in my hands again, or see the spun oakum slip through my fingers. But I have no need to complain. What harm I got by the *Betsey's* burning is nothing to what came to you."

"It was only the ordinary mischance of one who makes ventures in ships," Nicholas tried to say lightly.

"No, no, sir," John Ewing responded earnestly. "We all understand what it meant to you after—after—after what had gone before. There's not one of us but has had a hard struggle to make his way in these stormy times, but we all know that it's been a long sight harder for you. Never think that there's a man amongst us that's held you to blame for what's been lost. We've all of us been braver to face our own trouble, for seeing the unflinching heart you've carried, no matter what could come."

Nicholas walked away abruptly out of the house, unwilling to let the man see how he had felt those simple words. He took his homeward journey along the road, not letting himself think of any of the strange events which had filled the last few days, trying to make his attention dwell only upon the yellow autumn flowers blooming beside the road, upon little yellow-throated birds who swung and balanced on the slim twigs of the wild

cherry trees. Yet he was scarcely successful, for most of the way he walked blindly, with a dry choking in his throat, fighting away that question which would start up through every other thought, "What am I to do now?"

The rutted highway followed the course of a small stream, winding down and down in a fold of the hills. By the time he reached the bridge, the town, though actually not far away, was out of sight beyond the turn in the road. He had stopped for a moment to look down at the clear, brown water sliding below, when he threw back his head, startled by a strange sound, an unbelievable sound,—the report of a cannon. He stood motionless, listening, unable to believe that he had heard it. "Boom!" it came again.

A hundred fancies flashed through his mind; the British come once more, the calling of the people to some terrible alarm. Not one seemed remotely possible. The third deep boom sounded as he turned his face to the village and began to run.

It was so long a way that he could never keep up the pace; he was forced ever and again to drop into a panting walk, then, driven by he knew not what, into running again. It seemed hours before he came to the edge of the village. The streets were empty; he could not see beyond the houses to the harbor, though it was certain that the gunfire had come rolling in from beyond Branscomb Head.

He had reached the market square, yet even here was no one, save, yes, one man hastening with long-legged strides up the street which led from the water. It was Abner Hoxie, the town crier, ringing his bell as he advanced, come to do his duty and cry the news in the proper place, even though he had never a listener.

He stopped in the middle of the square; then, as he

saw Nicholas running, stumbling toward him, his jaw dropped, his jangling bell fell silent.

"What is it? What is it?" the boy cried.

For the one time in all his career, Abner Hoxie's great voice failed him. His face worked, he made one attempt at words and then another; at last he spoke slowly and solemnly but scarcely above a hoarse whisper:

"God bless you, Nicholas Drury; it's your ship come home."





CHAPTER XIII

FAR VISIONS

It was Timothy Tripp whose privilege it was to fire those saluting guns as the *Jocasta* doubled Branscomb Head and stood in toward the harbor.

"There," he said, as the last report went echoing and reëchoing all down the length of the rocky point, "that will give Henrietta Sparrow something to think about."

What she thought was written plainly upon her face as she stood, with the rest of the crowded gathering upon the wharf,—that pinched face which had never before shown real feeling of any sort but down which, now, the slow tears of scarcely credulous joy were running. The throng was growing ever greater, as group after group of hurried, breathless people came running down the steep way to the waterside.

"Have you heard? Can you believe?" they kept crying one to another. More than one woman was sobbing aloud in sheer, hysterical relief after long-endured sorrow. Questions, speculations and marvelings ran up and down until suddenly a voice at the outer edge of the crowd said: "Yonder comes young Mr. Drury."

There was a hush of dead silence as Nicholas, hastening and panting like the rest, came down through the shipyards and out upon the dock. No one could find words to speak to him; the nearest woman drew a sharply audible breath of pain at the look upon his face. Pretenses were all swept aside, and the strain of that endless anguished watching was only in part giving way before the almost impossible miracle of hopes fulfilled. Caleb Harmon alone stepped forward.

"Which boat, sir?" he asked.

Nicholas indicated the little yawl moored at the far end of the dock, and the two tumbled into her, cast loose and got up the small, square sail. As they swung out into the basin of the harbor, there, indeed, was the *Jocasta*, clothed in full panoply of sail, serene and steady, moving toward them, her canvas full, her tall bow rising and falling with the running waves. She was not now that proud, untested beauty which had set out with all their hearts and hopes aboard her; she was a worn and weather-scarred ship of world-wide voyaging. Her sails were no longer snowy white as those two had last seen them; they were gray and some of them patched. What breezes had filled them, what storms had torn them asunder? Ah, how little it mattered now, since there had been winds to waft her home!

Easily and beautifully she came toward them, leaning a little to the quartering wind. The men on her deck were beginning to be recognizable; a small, monkey-like figure, clinging to the shrouds and waving his hat in a very frenzy, was quite unmistakable. Then, in the stern, appeared that "beacon to lay a course by," Michael's red head, as a glorious, tumultuously joyful hail came across the water.

"Nicholas—Nicholas!"

The yawl drew alongside and dropped her sail. Not

even the salute of guns had so rocked the echoes of Branscomb Harbor as did the cheer that went up from ship and shore when Nicholas Drury climbed on board the *Jocasta*.

It was no small task, that telling of the tale on both sides, of what had happened in those two tense years. Nicholas, at first summed up his record briefly.

"We worked and waited," he said, but bit by bit, as the days passed, came casual mention of Darius Corland, the new government, the brig *Betsey*, the election of General George Washington as President of the United States.

With the returned wanderers, it seemed, however, that the story would never have done. The recounting began at that moment when, after the first excited greetings, Nicholas had asked:

"But Michael, where is it that you have been?" and his friend had cried out in desperate dismay over their having failed to have news of the *Jocasta's* far destination.

The West Indies and Raoul La Rocque, the touching at their first South American port of Rio—"Do not let me begin to tell you of Rio harbor, I must get on with my tale—" the battle with the Horn, the long cruise which ended in the bay before Wickananish's village, that was as far as the record could go during the first day. The narrative was interrupted a hundred times, for Michael to greet Etienne Bardeau, for him to walk up the hill to the Blackbird Inn, where Thomas Drury clasped his hand and said little but "Well done," yet conveyed a whole world of approbation and delight in those two words. Phoebe Harmon threw both her arms about Michael's neck and kissed him, while he, looking over her shoulder all the while, had his eyes so riveted upon Dolly Drury that her dancing, saucy smile grew suddenly faltering

and, in the end, her greeting of her brother's friend was in brief but shakily happy words.

The days which followed fairly buzzed with activities, the unloading of the *Jocasta*, the disposing of her cargo and distributing her profits or a proportion of the goods which she had brought home, among all those who had combined in sending her to sea.

There came to be a saying in that countryside which lasted through two generations:

"Dowered like a maid of Branscomb." All those young ladies, some brave, some hesitating and slightly tearful, all who had shared in the great venture, got back their own in such richness of silks, embroidered shawls, India muslins, and willow-pattern plates, that their own homes and those of their children's children were distinguished for household treasures through long years to come. Some of the less romantic and the more thrifty chose to take the return for their venture of linens in the form of chests of tea or bags of coffee, which their merchant fathers sold to good advantage to swell their daughters' marriage portions.

Just as on the day of the *Jocasta's* launching, men of worth had left their countinghouses to visit the shipyards of Branscomb, those same men now came crowding about the long building beside the Drury wharf, in spirited competition to buy what she had brought home. Mr. Rufus Craythorpe was almost the first among them, with a cautiously limited offer for tea which was immediately overwhelmed by the eager bidding of half a dozen more.

"But, Nicholas," he protested, "do you not remember that I was the last one to stand by you when all other custom had fallen away?"

Michael answered for his friend. "Mr. Drury has told me that you were, indeed, one of the very last who told

him that he was no judge of a ship," he observed, whereat Mr. Craythorpe had the grace to redden.

Soft-hearted Nicholas, made more understanding of others' disappointment by what he had suffered in the last few months, was troubled by the little man's grievously downcast face.

"I can repay you the mortgage on the Blackbird Inn and a year of added interest to conclude the loan at once," he offered. Mr. Craythorpe brightened a trifle, for, though he was loth to take his hands off that pleasant property, here at least was a trifle of unexpected gain. But his face was still long and his tone was pathetic, as he declared:

"A man's prominence in the commercial world of this neighborhood is measured, just now, by what China, Java and India goods he has to sell!"

Michael had gauged the situation with singular quickness from such brief information as his friend had given him. He saw that Nicholas, so happy that he wished happiness to every one else, was about to give way, and broke in with a determined suggestion.

"Just what was your offer to Mr. Drury for the chartering of the brig *Betsey*? I think we could manage to spare you Chinese goods whose worth would amount to the equal of that sum."

With this the insistent Mr. Craythorpe was forced to be content. Since there was promise of good profit on every dollar's worth of tea and silk, he went away openly sorrowing, for the first time in his life, that he had driven so close a bargain.

In the brief, quiet hour at the end of the day's business, the two friends would sit in talk together in the little room above the wharf, where Michael would carry forward the still unfinished account of the *Jocasta's* adventures.

"We were nearer to losing her in that typhoon in the China Sea, than by any risk of Indians or pirates," he said.

"Timothy Tripp says that your handling of her was all that kept the whole of you from destruction," Nicholas insisted. "Captain Douglas cannot speak too highly of you as commander of the ship."

Michael shook his head in stout denial. "When a storm of such a kind has a vessel in its clutch, her living or perishing is determined by the man who built her, not the man who sails her," he maintained.

Captain Douglas had not recovered until after they had passed the Malacca Straits, when, as he himself told Nicholas, the difficult portion of the voyage was over. When Michael sailed again, he would be amply qualified to be master of his ship. Under Michael, the *Jocasta* had touched at Batavia and under Captain Douglas at Calcutta, but only briefly, for "every man of us was ravenous for home."

Often Etienne Bardeau joined the two at the counting-house, and paced restlessly about the little room while the others sat talking. Great news had come for him by the slow carriage of messages of those days. With the uprising of the people of Paris, the Revolution had actually begun. Until his ship should return from Halifax to take him home, Etienne must wait, with scant patience, with a thousand speculations, with no outward lamentation but with such chafing and fretting of the inward spirit that, as he said, he was "ill company for home-coming wanderers."

"Ah, liberty! It is the great adventure of the history of our times, and of all time for many years to come," was the burden of what he kept saying. "To gain it, to be worthy to keep it! One by one the nations will see what others have attained and will hazard their all to win freedom for themselves. You in America have taken

the first step; you have had your turn; now it is ours. God help us, God guide us."

An English brig had recently sailed from Boston for London upon which he might have taken passage, but he had refrained, knowing that he would arrive the sooner by waiting for his own swifter and more direct ship. Yet two travelers had departed from Branscomb to go to sea upon that British merchantman,—Darius Corland and Joseph Ryall. It was said among Mr. Corland's acquaintance that he was to travel in England for a space of time, to consult with certain great kinsfolk over matters of family property. The man of law was to make this pleasant tour with him, that all the great man's affairs should be well tended.

"A liar to the end!" commented Michael, when he heard this version of Darius Corland's reasons for departure.

Only those three good comrades there in the counting-house, knew that he could never come back. In time, after many prosperous voyages of the *Jocasta*, that property which had been suffered to pass into his hands so that the shipyards might continue, would, they all hoped, come back to Thomas Drury. Already Mr. Hugh Hollister, as broadly smiling as though it were himself who was coming out of poverty into prosperity, was preparing deeds for the re-transfer of the big house beyond the town. The sale had been arranged with Mr. Ryall and Mr. Hollister as agents. Mr. Corland had not appeared in the matter.

Nicholas had seen Darius Corland, the day before he was to set out for Boston, go rolling in his chaise down the post road, past the Blackbird Inn for the last time. He had drawn in his horses and sat, holding them, as they champed and jerked, while he thought for a moment, then had loosed the reins and gone rumbling away in a cloud of dust. That impulse, that desire to come in to

say farewell to his lifelong friend, Thomas Drury, he had abandoned for very shame of looking a truly upright man in the face.

They had been speaking of him, these three in the countingroom after Mr. Craythorpe had gone.

"Darius brought about his own banishment," Etienne said, "and he has forced himself to go from a new, free country, where peace has come at last, where the opportunities are great, where he could be a much-looked-to man if he would, back to the old world where war, suffering and immeasurable tumult are about to break forth everywhere."

"But England is at peace now," observed Nicholas.

"It is peace for a moment," returned Etienne, "but only truce before another and more terrible struggle. That battle for liberty which you in America have so stoutly won will seem but a small thing beside the contest which is to arise on our side of the seas. It must be, it cannot be otherwise than that all Europe will be plunged into war as the old tyrants fall, and new ones strive to rise up in their places. Then, above all times, we will be thankful for America and her ships. England, France, Spain and Holland, they all have been warring these many years and have sunk vessels faster than they can build them. The world will soon see a famine in ships, so that, with the men of Europe under arms and unable to till the soil, it must be by food and goods carried by the vessels of America that our countries are to subsist. The *Jocasta* and all her sisters to come must spread their sails wide."

He had talked with such vigor that he had freed himself a little from his restless disquiet and stood still beside the window.

"I weary you with my haranguing," he said, with a quiet smile, "therefore we will turn to lighter things.

As I came down the street, past the house of Monsieur Hollister, Timothy Tripp came out with a face all radiant, and bade me, and all of you also, to his wedding this day fortnight. I shall not be here, but you must make ready for a great festivity. Michael, will it be your duty, or Mr. Hollister's, to give the bride away?"

Certainly Henrietta Sparrow, with that dower chest carried home from China, could no longer say that she was not sufficiently prepared for marriage. Her object, through all those years, was to have more household goods than other spinsters, since she was so ill-equipped with charms and graces. But now it was not really the possession of such treasure which had brought her to give consent at last. Honest affection for Timothy Tripp had got the better, during those long months of sorrow, of the cautious, domineering nature which she showed to all the world. A strangely assorted pair they were, but they suited each other to the point of promising much happiness.

The other gifts of Leung Tsi-pun had been distributed to their proper owners. The jade bowl for Nicholas now stood on the top of the cupboard, below the drawing of the *Jocasta*. Thomas Drury played chess with a most beautifully carved company of ivory kings, queens, knights and castles. Captain Douglas had gone home to Melford with his bird and flower rugs to make glad the heart of the daughter who was mistress of his house.

Michael had presented to Dolly the brocade-wrapped package and had watched her unfold an oblong, delicately carved ivory box which, when opened, showed a glitter of gold and jewels which made her exclaim in delighted astonishment. Here were silver and gold pins and combs, inlaid with jade and jasper, such as Chinese ladies wear in their hair.

"Surely you are mistaken; they cannot be for me, for

one of whom the nice, good Chinaman knew nothing," she said. "And look, look! He could never have purposed that these should be mine." Round-eyed, she held up a string of milky pearls.

"They are for you," Michael insisted.

"But how could Leung Tsi-pun have ever heard of me?" she protested. "What could he have said to make you think that he was sending me so marvelous a gift?"

"He—he put the statement in his Oriental idiom which I cannot quite translate to you now," Michael explained grandly but vaguely. "But there is certainly no doubt of his purpose and his meaning. He sent them for you."

Three days later the French ship lay in Branscomb Harbor and Etienne was to sail at dawn. His impatience was gone now, he was very quiet and gentle as he went about, saying farewell to the multitude of friends which even such a short stay had made for him. It chanced that in the afternoon he, Nicholas and Michael had all ascended to the loft of the shed, so that Nicholas might show them where the letter of Darius Corland had been so safely hidden. They were intent in talk, telling one another those things for which there would soon be no opportunity, and they sat down upon the hay to finish what clamored to be said.

There was no need for darkness or secrecy now. They could fling wide to the sunshine all the windows of the loft, the two on opposite sides, under the peak of the roof, and the small ones under the eaves. One of the little openings framed a view of the garden with Thomas Drury in his armchair under the plum trees, with Dolly sitting beside him reading aloud,—Dolly with soft autumn wind in her hair and with one of the Manchu jade and silver combs holding the ruffled curls in place. The other looked down toward the harbor and showed the shoulder of a point, with comfortably nestled houses basking in

the sun, showed the basin of the harbor and the *Jocasta* swinging at her anchor. The murmur of Dolly's reading came up to them, the voices of the blackbirds in the marsh and the cool sweep of the long waves on the beach beyond. A droning bumblebee wandered in out of the sunshine, flew hither and yon for a moment, talking to himself, and then launched out into the brightness, beyond the opposite window.

The talk was all of the future, of the great things which the world was presently to see. Michael, although he was as eager of speech as the others, and missed no word of what they said, held his glance steadily upon Dolly sitting below under the trees. The vision of Etienne Bardeau, both of body and mind, seemed fixed upon some splendid dream for his own country, seen by him somewhere beyond the turmoil of destruction into which she had just now fallen. As for Nicholas, leaning against a beam beside the others, his eyes were fixed on that round of glittering water and on the *Jocasta* lifting to the ripples of the incoming tide. Thus these three friends sat together in the hay and reconstructed the world.

They talked of what might come to France and to England, but most of all, what it was that America was to do. Some of what they guessed was too visionary to be fulfilled, but in much of their peering into the years to come, they foresaw rightly.

They were looking forward upon a stretch of years to which we, in our age, are looking back. It is not mere romance and sentiment which makes men regard with such depth of feeling that period when great white ships went out of all America's ports to carry to the world more than the mere cargoes in their holds, to bring back more than mere wealth in gold and silver. It was the beginning of a new epoch, the first step forward of a country which only a few years past had been an ex-

ploited colony. First she had been a war-torn field of rebellion, then a struggling group of States which must learn union, must find money, must gather experience in a form of rule so little tried in modern times. Men said, even then, that a republic was a government of blundering, clumsy effort, yet were forced at last to see that it was also one of glorious opportunities. And now America was setting forth upon that path which was to bring her to world power, which was to lead to vast things of which those three in the hay could only remotely dream.

The twilight came; the voice below fell into silence, the sound of the sea came ever louder through the gloom. The shadowy outline of the *Jocasta* was only faintly visible against the dull silver of the harbor. Etienne Bardeau got up from his place. His ship sailed at daylight and he must presently go on board.

"Good-by," he said. "Things begin and end, but we who have our work to do must ever go forward."





